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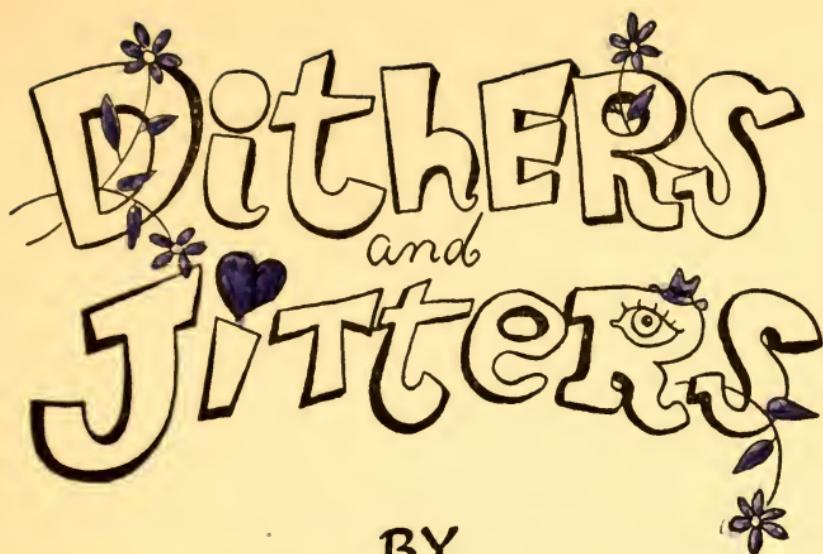


DITHERS
AND
JITTERS



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DITHERS
and
JITTERS

BY
CORNELIA
OTIS SKINNER

AUTHOR OF
✓ "EXCUSE IT, PLEASE"

DRAWINGS BY *alajálov.*

DODD, MEAD & COMPANY
NEW YORK ♦ 1945

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TO MY FATHER

191157

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CONTENTS

DITHERS AND JITTERS	3
BUSINESS PARTY	11
YOGA ATTEMPTED	25
"POUR LE SPORT"	35
THE IMPORTANCE OF COCKTAILS	45
IT'S A WISE PARENT	53
FLORAL PIECE	65
LONG AFTER AUDUBON	75
PARTY ON OLYMPUS	87
BONNY BOATING WEATHER	97
PLATFORM PERFORMANCE	107
"THE SKIN-GAME"	117
VAULTING AMBITION	127
"ALLOW ME, MADAME"	139
EAR, NOSE AND THROAT	151
HEAVENLY BODIES	161





DITHERS AND JITTERS

DITHERS AND JITTERS

A BRIEF DIGEST OF THE INTIMATE MEMOIRS OF
MABEL FUDGE HULAN



This is my gift to gather together the most brilliant personalities of my century. My soirées have become famous. At the time I am writing about they were just beginning to be the talk of the intelligentsia. My dynamic temperament attracted to the little house on Mott Street the titans of the day. Henry James, Picasso,

DITHERS AND JITTERS

Stravinsky, Oscar Wilde, and Ty Cobb, not to mention Ibsen and Loie Fuller. What evenings! We sat about on bath mats (all of us except Yeats, who lay quietly on the stove) and discussed psychoanalysis, child labor, the Dreyfus case, and the race problem. It was very beautiful. Freud would remark, "Mabel, you are extraordinary! The eternal hetaira." I can't help it. I was born that way. (Aspasia . . . Astarte . . . Amnesia.)

Early in January I received the following note from Shaw:

MY DEAR MRS. FUDGE,

Sorry I can't dine with you next Monday. I am still in England.

Yours truly,
G. B. SHAW

That summer I moved to Florence. Everyone of importance followed me there. They all lived in the villa. Some had to sleep on the stairs or in cinquecento chests. Only to rare souls did we allot the privilege of sleeping in the lovely old well, carved by Benvenuto Cellini and haunted by the ghost of Simonetta. The place was vibrant with the iridescent quality of my aura. In some curious way I became the reincarnation of Lucrezia Borgia . . . so much

DITHERS AND JITTERS

so that when I spoke to Berenson about it he lost his appetite. I was majestic and picturesque . . . glamorous in asphodels and conch shells and an exquisite Etruscan toga my spaniel had dug up near the Farnese cesspool. Sargent painted me in that delicious costume. Later he destroyed the canvas. My smile eluded him. (Dryad!) I also posed for the "Nude Descending a Staircase." Here the artist was more successful.

I would wander about the *boiseries* of my *pied-à-terre, ad libidum*, suffering from a combination of *Weltschmerz* and *dolce far niente*. D'Annunzio drove up in a Bugatti *couleur de rose*. He had mistaken my driveway for the one next door. He said, "Please forgive me, Madam." (Actually his words were "*Scusi, signora*.") His lips were rich and red . . . as if he'd been eating pomegranates . . . or raspberry *gelati*. The wind howled sexually.

Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas spent the summer with me. Also a little man from Mallorca whose name I have forgotten. He collected cactuses. My husband was along too. I have also forgotten his name. I did not love him. I never love my husbands . . . that is why I never remember their names. X was there . . . caught in the golden net of his love for me . . . his response to my magnetic intellect. I

DITHERS AND JITTERS

played with him as a cat with catnip. His wife resented me. She came from Maine and was incapable of the finer emotions. Every night Lolo scattered rose petals on the marble steps for me to crush beneath my cruel little slippers. Lolo's tragedy was that he wanted to love me but couldn't. He was in love with a Siamese cat. That was because the cat looked like me. I told him so, but he couldn't understand. One night his bed caught fire . . . they came running to me and asked me what to do. I was reading the sonnets of Michelangelo and didn't look up. "Put it out" was all I said.

That winter I kept house for paranoiacs. It was unique. In the living room was a piano, sofa, and some chairs. The bathroom had a tub. In the kitchen was an icebox and a gas range. My bedroom contained a vast bed with room for four.

For some time my butler had been acting queerly. One evening he flung down the soup tureen and caught me in his arms. He, too, had fallen hopelessly in love with me. "Kouskous" he called me. It was a name he had brought back from Afghanistan (he was part Saluki) along with some lovely carpets (which I had made into tea gowns) and a jeweled back-scratcher. Although I hated him, I deliberately roused his lust by sending my essence out over the

DITHERS AND JITTERS

salad course. One day little Bobo rushed in with the news that the butler was dead. Suicide. He had clawed himself to bits with the back-scratcher.

Ravel dedicated his "Bolero" to me. Here is a note from him:

DEAR MRS. FUDGE,

I gladly send my autograph.

RAVEL

One evening Frieda and Lawrence came to dinner (had asked Lawrence of Arabia, but he was afraid to meet me). Little happened except when Brett threw an *omelette fines herbes* at Mrs. Sanger. I said nothing, but sat remotely on the mantelpiece in shimmering satin. I wore also a wreath of sagebrush and little crickets. Suddenly the door opened and in walked Pinto, his face suffused with heroic anger. He was completely naked.

I should like to conclude this volume of memoirs (there are twenty-four more to appear) with a significant letter from Emma Goldman:

DEAR MABLE,

Can't come to your hasheesh party. Am leaving for prison. So sorry.

EMMA







BUSINESS PARTY

BUSINESS PARTY



HERE comes a moment in the life of the average New York woman when her husband says to her, "There's an important business man in town for the week. He's here with his wife and we'll have to take them out for an evening." The fact that this announcement is uttered with the apologetic reluctance of a surgeon breaking the news that an amputation is necessary, merely makes one brave. "It's that Hoffman fellow with the big account. Sorry. It has to be done." With a baleful look

DITHERS AND JITTERS

and muttering clichés about “selling your birthright” and “just another form of prostitution” you drag yourself to the phone and call Mrs. Hoffman at the Waldorf. You tell her who you are and she says “Oh, yes” in a tone which indicates that Mr. Hoffman has been working on her too. Why, yes, they’d simply love to dine and go to the play. As for what they’d like to see . . . oh, anything. You entertain a malicious impulse to suggest “Tobacco Road” but your husband’s career hangs in the balance and you offer the season’s musical hit which you have already seen three times. Mrs. Hoffman says that will be lovely and you, contemplating the probable cost of the tickets, almost retort that it had better be. You manage to burble how glad you are they are in town and how nice it will be to see them and other interesting entries for the note-book of the recording angel. After which you arrange to meet for dinner at a restaurant whose prices are in keeping with the style to which none of you are accustomed.

The appointed evening arrives and so do you . . . fifteen minutes late. En route in the taxi you and your husband have been discussing pretty heatedly just whose fault this is and from the look of the waiting Hoffmans they, too, have been giving each other their particular family brand of hell. The greet-

BUSINESS PARTY

ing is consequently over-effusive. Mr. Hoffman is large and rich and fifty and looks like an elevated Elk. Mrs. Hoffman is permanently waved both as to hair and figure and is of an age the French would call "certain." Profuse with apologies, you make your way to the bar where, as an anodyne for the evening before you, you down twice your usual ration of cocktail. The Hoffmans do the same. This takes quite some while and you arrive at your table at the hour that you should be arriving at the theater. The menus are written in French. As far as Hoffman is concerned, they might be written shorthand in Chinese. The head waiter, realizing this, suggests grouse and champagne. Mr. Hoffman looks as if steak and onions were more in his line and Mrs. Hoffman gives the impression of being a fruit-salad-with-whipped-cream fancier; but the head waiter has the air of having a sawed-off machine-gun in his hip pocket and you all submit. Conversation during dinner is definitely impersonal. After a few polite generalities your husband goes into a business huddle with Hoffman and you are left to make merry with Mrs. You talk about the shops she has patronized, about how she likes New York. She is the kind who refers to your apartment as your "home." The champagne helps.

DITHERS AND JITTERS

After dinner you rush to the theater in time to miss most of the first act. During the intermission the men go out for a smoke and you again find yourself stranded with Mrs. Hoffman. By the end of the intermission you have exhausted all apparent topics of conversation as well as each other and are busily reading everything in the program from the credits to the familiar admonition of John Dohrman, fire commissioner, who claims that "this theater can be emptied in 4 minutes." He's a liar, because after the final curtain it's a good fifteen before you find yourself on the pavement in the ranks of the taxi-seekers. The theater is far west on a west-bound street and under ordinary circumstances you'd have walked to the corner to hail an east-bound vehicle . . . as indeed would the Hoffmans; but a ragged youth who looks as if he were taking down names for the forthcoming revolution opens the door of a waiting cab and your husband, after remunerating him, meekly helps you in.

You have reserved a table at a popular night club. Its popularity is manifest by the blast of stale air mingled with perfumed disinfectant that greets you at the door, and by the bored look on the faces of a small mob waiting for the lift. The place is a transformed garage and the elevator, built to convey auto-

BUSINESS PARTY

mobiles, is doctored up with red plush and some framed Ciro menus, most of which have to do with children doing things childish. In a discreet murmur you ask Mrs. Hoffman if she'd care to powder her nose. With alacrity but refinement she admits that she, too, is only human. The room marked "Ladies" is crowded with what appears to be anything else but. Glittering creatures, they scowl at each newcomer, pointedly clutch their purses to their brazen bosoms, and take up all available space before wash-basin, mirror, and what-have-you. A leaky radiator lets forth a blast from Avenus and a noise like a peanut-wagon. Beside it sits an individual as wan as her Harlem complexion will allow, in a torn sweater and the throes of what sounds like bronchial pneumonia. She holds the faucets while you wash your hands with a sliver of soap resembling the top off a piano-key and doles out a towel as stiff, if not as clean, as a man's shirt-front; for which ministration she grudgingly accepts a quarter.

You rejoin the gentlemen who are standing unhappily behind a velvet rope looking into the dance-room like tourists at Sans-Souci. For ten minutes nothing happens. Then a head waiter rushes up like mad, flourishes a bit of card-board, and says "Yes, sir." Your husband states his name and the

DITHERS AND JITTERS

fact that he has made a reservation. The head waiter, with an air of suppressed excitement, again says "Yes, sir" and dashes off, making semaphore signals at another waiter. They both disappear and again nothing happens. After a time the second head waiter appears like an apparition in "Macbeth," looks intense, and says "Yes, sir." Your husband repeats his application for admission and this waiter, too, repeats a hectic "Yes, sir." Then he, too, scoots off, emitting curious smacking noises that in a less conventional person would sound like kisses. Again you are on the outside looking in. Mrs. Hoffman gives Mr. Hoffman a glance that clearly indicates what she thinks of his business acquaintances and your husband shows symptoms of imminent combustion. A third head waiter (the place is run on a Triumvirate policy) races up to say "Yes, sir." This time your husband calls him "captain" which has the same magical effect as calling a police sergeant "officer." He acknowledges the commission with a bow and announces, "We have your table, sir."

As a matter of fact, three bus-boys have it . . . bringing it in from some hidden store-room. Two are bearing the legs and one is rolling along the top. They select a corner of the already over-populated dance-floor and proceed to set it up as if it were a

BUSINESS PARTY

hurdle to the passing couples and cover its kitchen nudity with a frayed felt pad and cloth. Squeezing through a maze of elbows, backs, evening-wraps, you make your way to this festive board, which has a distinct wobble, and distribute yourselves . . . the Hoffmans facing the dancers "so they can see" and you and your husband jutting out onto the floor, imperiled by every passing fanny. After champagne, grouse, and the theater you are all in a condition of thirst equal to twenty-four waterless hours on the Sahara and you turn avidly to the waiters, all of whom have vanished into not any too thin air. In fact, the air itself has vanished, giving place to blue smoke. With parched lips you ask your husband to do something, and he claps his hands at a stray bus-boy who, taking this for a sign of inebriation, merely smiles indulgently and goes about his business. He tries hitting a glass with a fork, which confirms the original impression. He even attempts those kissing noises, which are grossly misinterpreted by a drunk at the next table. At length a perspiring menial appears, writes what looks like arabic on a card, and departs. He is followed by another and in turn by a third who both inquire if your order has been taken. It's been taken all right . . . right over into Bergen County, and by the time some liquid arrives you are

DITHERS AND JITTERS

beginning to suffer from hallucinations.

Due to your proximity to the band, conversation is reduced to sign language. In fact, the din is so great you can't hear yourself think . . . which is just as well, because what you're thinking isn't fit to be heard. Mr. Hoffman signals an invitation to dance. Mr. Hoffman's dancing has in it something of the Dalcroze method. His feet follow a four-four time while his left hand pumps an animated three-four, both of which are at utter variance with the music. Moreover, Mr. Hoffman is prosperously adipose. You feel as if you were being clutched by a pillow. Eventually a fanfare from the traps proclaims the fact that the entertainment (so-called) is about to begin. This misnomer comprises a dance team with a name like "Juan and Juanita." To passionate music they slink forth stealthily into a blue spot-light that shines directly into your eyes and with expressions of considerable anguish, the man clutching the woman by the abdomen, go into what one supposes is an adagio. This is followed by a tango equally passionate. As an encore they render a lively skipping bit meant to be ball-room comedy. This dubious divertissement is acclaimed by the spectators, most of whom haven't been watching. Some applaud, some thump with their spoons, and the drunk at the next table rouses

BUSINESS PARTY

from deep slumber to emit a shrill whistle of appreciation. The dance team is followed by a young society woman who, fired by success in the Junior League Follies, has turned crooner. As a blues singer she's about as authentic as Betty Boop, might be as ~~Isolde~~, but Mrs. Hoffman thinks she's "gorgeous" and Mr. Hoffman in more honest vernacular calls her "hot stuff"; so you applaud the inanities she croaks into a microphone, reflecting acidly that, given a similar figure, you could sing that well yourself.

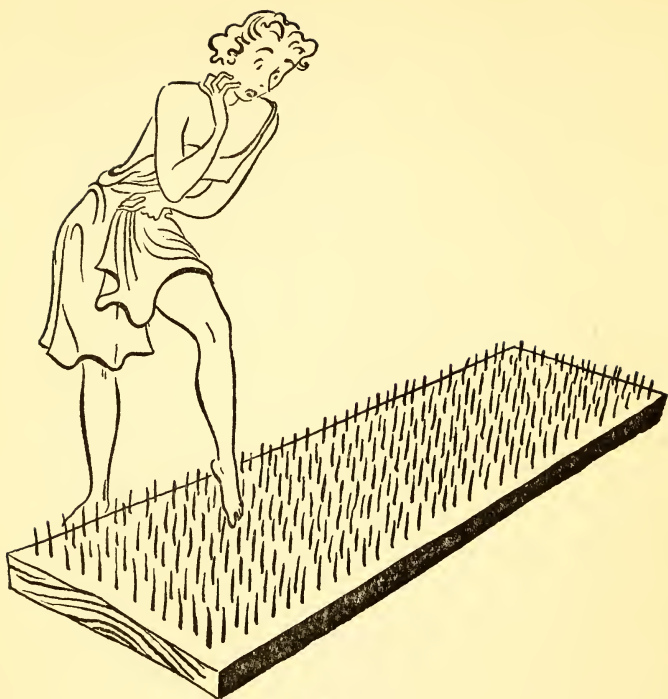
Meanwhile the neighboring drunk decides he wants to fight. Lacking Schmeling or a war, he picks on Mr. Hoffman . . . his provocation being that Hoffman has grazed him with his elbow. Wheeling about, he calls Mr. Hoffman ~~an~~ ^{something} epithet acceptable only in the historical plays of Shakespeare, which Mr. Hoffman, who is nothing if not legitimate, resents. The lady companion of the drunk, who is only one degree less boiled, comes to the rescue by tweaking the offender's ear and admonishing him to be a good boy. Mr. Hoffman, his dignity and lineage restored, asks his wife to dance and you seize the opportunity to suggest that your husband demand the check. He has already done so and, when the Hoffmans return, your proposition that you all go home is met with the only enthusiasm left in anyone.

DITHERS AND JITTERS

The taxis on the stand outside all look like contestants in the first Vanderbilt Cup Race. Praying that it will hold together, you enter one and drive home, dropping the Hoffmans on the way.

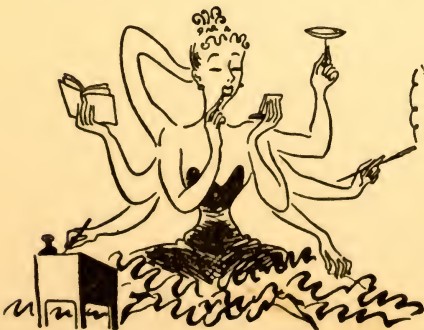
You fall into bed feeling terrible. Next morning you feel even more so. You call your husband at his office. He also has a head. You inquire if he has landed Hoffman's account. In weak triumph he states that he has . . . then adds that after figuring his probable commission and the cost of last night his profit will be about 95 cents . . . which, after all, is good for a couple of meals at Liggett's.







YOGA ATTEMPTED



YOGA ATTEMPTED



N acquaintance of mine who hitherto has been in a state of chronic mental and physical collapse and has always seemed like something off the top shelf of Dr. Caligari's cabinet, recently came to call, looking aggressively radiant and like a different person. She attributes it all to Yoga and in so insistently eloquent a manner that, were I not convinced of her integrity, I'd suspect her of being a scout for some Swami. Not only did she deliver a free and

DITHERS AND JITTERS

rather convincing talk on her newly discovered therapy, she illustrated it with a number of exercises that were pretty embarrassing but none the less impressive. Just what good it does body and soul, to say nothing of the state of mind of the domestics, to set down your drink and stand slowly on your head, I can't at present say. But it seemed a fine idea at the time and, to clinch the matter, the following day I chanced to see a book on Yoga in a shop window.

Purchasing books that deal with religion, health, or "how to be happy though manic-depressive" shames me horribly. I always pretend I'm getting them for somebody else. After thumbing over "Serenade" and "The Hussy's Handbook" I bought the Yoga volume, laughing slyly as if it were meant as a joke, took it home, threw it in a suitcase, and never gave it another thought until I came across it several weeks later on a day I was by chance spending in a Cleveland hotel. Outside it was dank and cheerless. There was nothing to do but pay some back bills or go see Jane Withers in person. The time seemed perfect for trying out some Yoga, so I opened the book and skimmed a bit. It was illustrated with drawings of a sylph-like creature performing a lot of occult acrobatics. Disliking exercises in any form, I turned to the section dealing with meditation. What little I

YOGA ATTEMPTED

read was fascinating and I was all for starting for Nirvana in a big way. The author's warning that not only is Yoga for the few but that to do it properly requires not only months of practice but an experienced teacher, or *guru*, in no way discouraged me. After all, you can't just pick up the classified phone directory and expect to find the address of a first-class *guru*. As for the months of practice, what the hell—I'm quick at languages, why not at Yoga?

I began under a definite handicap, for the book stated that the proceedings should take place in a quiet room kept only for meditation and prayer. The hotel had just housed a refrigerator's convention and I doubted if any of the rooms had been devoted to spiritual communion. "Yoga teachers recommend flowers for your sanctuary and the burning of incense." Here was a further hurdle. I don't travel with incense and, besides, if you start burning it in the bedroom of a commercial hotel there's no telling what it may lead to. As for flowers, all I had was a corsage of gardenias that had been kept so long they'd turned into marigolds. The instructions that one must face either east or north complicated things further, for murky clouds completely obscured the position of the sun and I wasn't up on my Cleveland geography anyway. I toyed with the idea of asking

DITHERS AND JITTERS

the operator or possibly the head porter which way was east but was afraid of having to explain too much, so I muttered a sort of "eeny-meeny-miney-mo" and took a chance on it. For a mat, one is told to fold a blanket then cover it with fur or silk. So I pulled a blanket off the bed and spread over it a rather filmy slip that didn't look particularly occult. Then, attired in what the poets might call my "shift," I set to work.

The book opened to the picture of a fantastic being sitting cross-legged in lama-like pose. Running down its middle was a sort of X-ray view of brain and spinal column, only in lieu of ordinary ganglia and vertebrae there appeared at intervals a couple of lotuses, an elephant with seven trunks, a goat, and a dragon. This seemed a trifle advanced for a beginner and I decided to tackle the position before turning myself into a zoo. The creature was seated in an attitude known as the "Padmasana" or *lotus-seat*, which looked as if it might be tough on the lotus but otherwise simple enough, being chiefly a question of folding the legs. This to a trained Yogin may be just like folding the arms, but to a novice it's a contortionist act worth booking in vaudeville. Moreover, there's a saying in my family that the Skinners don't bend (if there isn't such a saying there will be

YOGA ATTEMPTED

from now on). To place the right ankle on the left thigh is bad enough, but then to bring the left ankle over the right shin and get *it* somewhere up on the lap requires the strength and cunning of the village blacksmith. I strained and panted, hissing expletives that were hardly in the spirit. Twice my convulsive writhings twisted off the silk slip and necessitated starting all over again. Finally with super-human effort I managed to forge myself into a pattern that bore a slight resemblance to the lotus-seat. I'm not up on lotuses and I've never deliberately sat on one but if they feel anything like my shin-bones I for one am going back to the old-fashioned morris-chair. The pain was excruciating. The book, however, assures one it's all a matter of rising above discomfort and I found solace in the thought that at least I hadn't reached the enlightened state of having to sit on nails. If this was the proper position for contemplation I was all for going the limit.

My ideas on how to set about contemplating were decidedly vague. The classic phrase concerning Buddha and what he contemplated recurred to me but I lack (thank God) the celestial rotundity that makes this practical. I fixed my eyes, instead, upon the fading gardenias and tried following the author's advice to start in by "watching your thoughts." This

DITHERS AND JITTERS

may be fine for anyone who has thoughts that are very pretty to watch but I find that mine aren't worth a penny in a slot machine marked "For Adults Only." Aside from the all-pervading sense of acute pain, my mind-stream turned out to be a jumble of irrelevant commonplaces connected only by the strains of "I'm dancing and I can't be bothered now," a tune that won't apparently find its way out of my head. This was hardly the state of serenity I had anticipated. I felt an unfortunate premonition that instead of a guru what I probably needed was a psychiatrist. However, I kept on watching those gardenias, hoping one moment to go into a trance and fearful the next lest I should. Would I come out of it by myself or would they have to send for the house physician? Stories of Hindu fakirs came to mind. I remembered reading a scientific report on the disturbing subject of levitation and wondered in the event that I floated out through the transom how I'd explain myself to the floor-clerk.

After a time the gardenias began to change shape and I waited hopefully for a vision. But what appeared was merely more gardenias; staring at them so long had made me go slightly cross-eyed. I attempted a few of the breathing exercises—long rhythmic in-takes followed by periods of breath-

YOGA ATTEMPTED

holding, and tried to picture that seven-trunked elephant cavorting happily about in my chest. The author warns that this may cause dizziness and he's quite right. Not only was I dizzy but my anatomy from the waist down felt like something unearthed at Angkor Vat. I kidded myself that this was the beginning of "Pratyahara, or restraint of the senses," but it proved to be my limbs going to sleep so soundly a bombardment wouldn't have disturbed them. This, at least, was better than pain, and for what seemed a very long time I sat on in a state of granite. This might have lasted for hours if the door which I'd neglected to bolt hadn't burst open to admit the colored chamber-maid who, at sight of me, screamed, dropped a set of towels, and fled.

I decided to call it a day and extricate myself. This in my state of atrophy was no easy matter. It was somewhat like untangling the Laocoön, and for a time it looked as if I'd have to stay that way. I finally managed to pry one foot free and found to my relief the other moved of its own accord. Stiff and aching, I limped to the bed and fell upon it exhausted. Perhaps the trouble lay in the fact that I may not have been facing the right way. Maybe instead of east or north I was battling away west-sou'west. Next time I shall have a compass with me.





"POUR LE SPORT"





"POUR LE SPORT"



HE question of English clothes is closely akin to the question of English food, insofar as both are either the best in the world or the worst. Let me hasten to say that in this I am referring to feminine attire. For to cast an aspersion or even a glance other than rapturous at the raiment of that sartorially supreme being, the English male, would be not only the height of impudence but a clear indication of the beginnings of insanity.

DITHERS AND JITTERS

But to return to the original simile, one could never gainsay the excellence of their roasts, their teas, and their gooseberry tarts or inversely the horror of their coffee, their dish-watery vegetables, or those grim desserts that go by incredible names like "trifle" and "shape." Just so, one can neither fail to admire the average London lady in evening dress or sports clothes nor help averting one's eyes when that same majestic creature suddenly, with the grace of a Percheron colt in spring, goes "cute" and puts little wreaths and fillets in her hair or wears a street frock that not only sags but needs pressing.

As most British women have fine necks and arms, to say nothing of their justly famous complexions, and as even the ram-roddiest of them are blessed with that attribute so woefully lacking in their Yankee sisters—*manner*—they all look well in evening dress, even if the dress is threadbare and obviously out of date. When it comes to country attire, they of course wear this with such innate perfection, one wonders if they weren't all swaddled in Harris tweed and given Briggs shooting-sticks to teeth on. Certainly their sports clothes are the best in the world, but (and here goes for a remark which in my next visit to London may land me in the Tower) I'm wondering if they aren't suitable only to that part of

"POUR LE SPORT"

the world "that is forever England."

There is a good deal of the purely personal in the above observation. For some time I have been standing on the threshold of my closet gazing with admiration, delight, and no small dismay at a collection of tweed, wool, and leather avidly acquired on a recent trip to London. I have no one to congratulate or blame but myself, being the wretched sort of American who, wherever I travel, patronizes native industries. The answer to the tourist-tempter's prayer, I acquire yodel hats in Switzerland and burnouses in Algiers, and the only thing that deters me from going to China is the certainty that I'd come back with a dozen mandarin coats.

Naturally London at Coronation time, with its chills and fogs, its tempting shops, and its "far-flung-Empire-buy-British" atmosphere was too much for me, and bluffing myself with the idea that somehow it was a gesture of American homage to the new sovereigns, I succumbed to the lure of Peal, Cording, and Fortnum and Mason with the result that I may be forced to rent an extra floor in which to house my treasures. For certainly the average New York apartment is by no means commodious enough for any amount of heavy outdoor apparel.

Just as the docks of Liverpool, built to endure time

DITHERS AND JITTERS

and the climate, are three times as thick and sturdy as the piers in the North River, so the average English sports outfit, made likewise to defy years and the weather, is thrice as bulky as any little number from the Manhattan wholesale marts. Put a couple of tweed suits, a raglan cape and a Burberry in a New York closet and the chances are you'll find all the rest of your things squeezed into accordion pleats. No wonder the British refer to a closet as a clothespress!

I don't know whether or not it has anything to do with a difference in atmosphere, but I find that things seem to weigh more here than in England. To move with grace or agility in my divine Harris ensemble is nigh to impossible, and when it comes to my magnificent waterproof, I might with more ease be walking about in an army pup-tent. Not only is our ground-space ill adapted to this admirable clothing, but the only region where our climate is in any way suitable is out on the Northern Pacific coast, and if one lives in New York it's a little difficult to spend weekends amid the refreshing fogs of Puget Sound.

Perhaps other women are not as fussy as I. Perhaps they can wander about in British tweeds amid the bracing winds of autumn, then come in to lunch in a

"POUR LE SPORT"

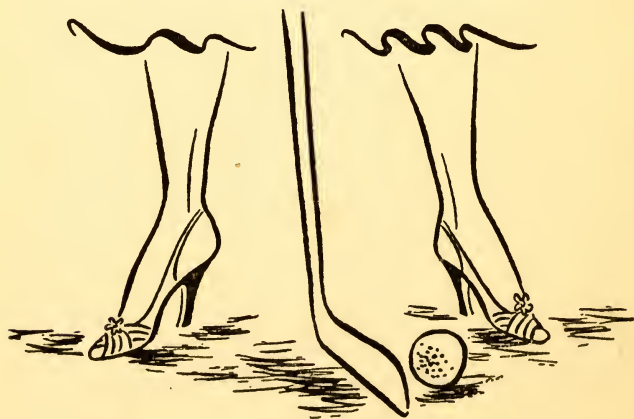
steam-heated American house and not break out with symptoms of hives, chickenpox, and poison ivy in their most pernicious forms. Perhaps they can wear a pair of stout oxfords and woolly shetland socks with comfort about the golf-links and on returning indoors fail to experience the sensation that not only have their feet doubled in weight and size, but have suddenly burst into flame. In Merrie England, where for four-fifths of the year dank cold envelops the land and chilblains never cease, where to enter the average house is to encounter the bright cheer of a mausoleum, where even to stand before a fire means frying the rear and refrigerating the front (or vice versa), there is comfort and logic in being heavily clad. But in our land of clear, dry air, of overheated houses and of tropically warm cars, it strikes me as perhaps picturesque but also the height of folly to dress as for the Kentish Wold.

Then too, in order to look at all authentic, one should be the outdoor type. And with all due respect to American womanhood we are not a race of hearties. Few of us could qualify as the dream-girl of Abercrombie and Fitch. We haven't the Britisher's flair for nonchalant attire and in our uncertainty we are apt to do appalling things like wearing pearls with a turtle-neck sweater or sheer stockings with

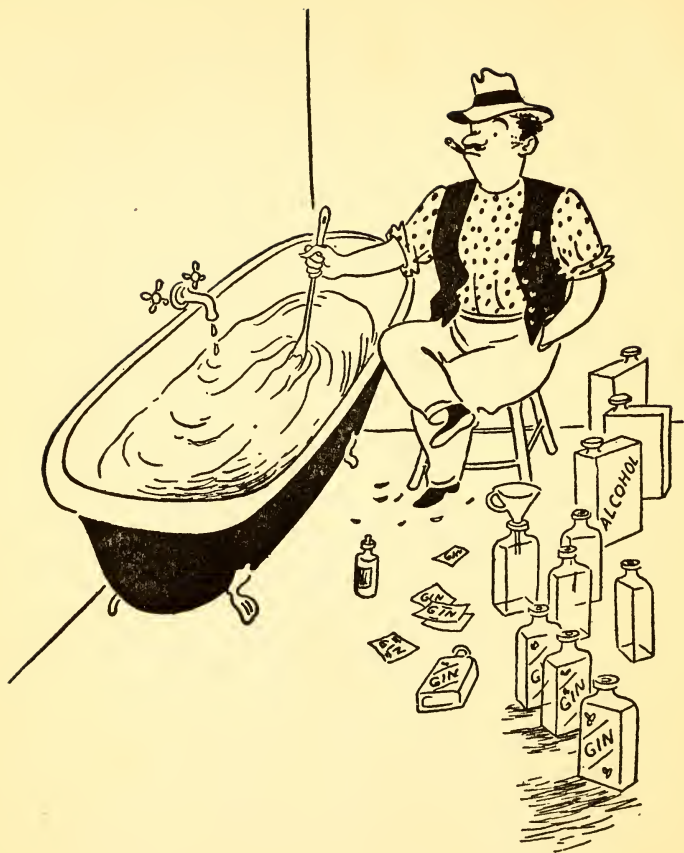
DITHERS AND JITTERS

golf-shoes. In sports clothes more than any other fashion, the smallest incorrect accessory puts everything out of kilter and places the wearer on a par with those dressy ladies who on Sunday mornings gallop 'round the Reservoir in polo shirts and velvet jockey-caps. And to keep up an adequate reserve of scarfs, handkerchiefs, wool hose, and pigskin gloves requires not only study but money.

I, for one, am about to give up trying to look like a picture in the *London Tatler*. There is too much of the Corn Belt in my make-up to allow me to wear those traditional trappings with the calm assurance they require. Henceforth, I shall stick to velvet and silk and doubtless attend all point-to-point races in Delman's highest heels.









THE IMPORTANCE OF COCKTAILS

THE IMPORTANCE OF COCKTAILS

OR OIL FROM THE LAMPS OF LIN YUTANG



COCKTAILS were first invented by the scholar Fung in the reign of the great Emperor Ts'ang Yüan Pao in the H'o dynasty. It is written that the scholar Fung was pouring grain alcohol out of a silver hsü into a jade h'mü¹ when the moon goddess appeared to him in a vision. She was bearing a spray of juniper berries and she bade him squeeze these into the liquid and add three

¹ Translator's note: A hsü is a goblet and a h'mü is a goblet, only more so.

DITHERS AND JITTERS

drops of lamp oil. This he did. Visions always made him thirsty and in his dreaminess he reached for his bowl of rice wine and picked up instead the h'mü² full of the magic liquid. Swallowing it in one gulp, he thought at first the vision had been a demon who had fed him hellfire, but in a moment he experienced sheer ecstasy. When he had sufficiently recovered, the scholar Fung presented his newly discovered drink to the Emperor Ts'ang Yüan Pao, who drank a gallon of it straight and made Fung his Chancellor. Next day the Emperor canceled all his audiences and Fung was beheaded. Since that time people have learned to partake of the moon goddess's beverage with more discretion.

Cocktail feasts can be very pleasant. They should be held in small rooms with low ceilings. All air should be carefully removed and replaced by blue smoke. There need be few chairs, because at first guests will remain standing. After a while they will prefer to lie down, and by that time they won't care what they lie on. For guests it is well to have a mixture of friends, enemies, and concubines. Conversation must be loud, continuous, and of a sort that can be understood by no one. The poet Hshshs'i has celebrated the early cocktail festivals in his famous poem

² See translator's note on page 45.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COCKTAILS

"One Hundred Grandfathers," and the beloved chronicler K'p'h gives the following charming account of the parties during the reign of the Emperor Hung:

The guests come, all bringing their pet crickets in little jade h'ings.³ That is very nice. Some of them get their crickets drunk and put them down the backs of their concubines. That, too, is very nice. The noise the crickets make is called ch'in. The noise the concubines make is called d'in.

Huangbang, the epicure, whose palate was so sensitive he could determine from the mere aroma of bird's nest soup just what kind of bird had built the nest, has left a book of rules for cocktail feasts. In lavish detail he tells just what sort of Sssze⁴ makes the best shakers and whether ice obtained from the fishmonger is superior to that obtained from the undertaker. In the matter of canapés much depends, he insists, on the quality of wood in the toothpick. Certain woods have a flavor that conflicts with the taste of small sausages; others have a consistency that makes them unfit for their proper and peculiar

³ Translator's note: H'ings are cricket cages. They are sometimes used for pet snails.

⁴ A Sssze is an early Hsia cocktail-shaker. They are made of old skulls. There are a few of these at Harvard.

DITHERS AND JITTERS

function. He suggests the correct arrangement of the room, ending with characteristic charm:

There should be butterflies circling about the heads of the guests. If there aren't any to begin with, there ought to be some later. These in turn may be pursued by small birds, but the guests need not be alarmed; the birds never catch up with the butterflies.

Huangbang lays great emphasis, too, on the proper times for serving certain drinks:

Old-Fashioneds should be drunk in the company of old men to the tune of a ch'in. There should be thistles in a pewter p't.⁵

Manhattans should be drunk in the company of concubines.

Alexanders should be drunk in the company of more concubines.

Stingers should be drunk in the company of Princeton scholars to the tune of a ukulele.

A White Lady should be drunk by the light of the moon.

Four White Ladies should be drunk by the light of two moons.

⁵ A p't is a pot.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COCKTAILS

For his devotion to this monumental work, the Emperor Yu-Hu bestowed on Huangbang a rare dragon, so rare, indeed, that only the Emperor and Huangbang could ever see it and then only after several days of cocktail feasting.

Seeing a dragon, no matter how rare, after a cocktail feast is regarded with disfavor in the West. This is unaesthetic and stupid. But then, you Occidentals will never know anything whatsoever about the art of living.





IT'S A WISE PARENT



IT'S A WISE PARENT



O one born west of the Alleghenies and reared in a suburban community, the social life of the New York child seems nothing short of amazing. In that remote and happy time known (unless Mrs. Roosevelt has a copyright on the title) as "my day," children met and played together for the obvious and uninspiring reason that their mothers were "such good friends." This convention seems to have gone the way of family prayers and dinner-calls and every year I become increasingly

DITHERS AND JITTERS

aware that I in no way move or even stir in those charmed circles in which my son not only moves but apparently whirls. No other New York parent appears to share my antiquated sense of etiquette. I have, once or twice, proffered a shy message to some nebulous mother to the effect that since our offspring are such buddies it might be nice if she'd bring her tapestry-work over some afternoon—an overture that has been met with as much bewilderment as if I'd asked her to dinner because we patronized the same osteopath.

Recently, while walking with my seven-year-old in the park, we encountered a little girl who was out with her father. The children exchanged a greeting that implied close acquaintanceship. I asked my son who she was and was casually informed she was his "girl friend." Concealing the stab to a mother's heart, I smiled as generously as I could at an embryo daughter-in-law and ventured to beam understandingly at the father who, incidentally, was a particularly handsome creature and on whose answering beam I was counting to establish what might prove to be a lasting and beautiful friendship. He gave me a look Robert Taylor might give an autograph seeker, tipped his hat and strolled aside, the while his child (the minx!) rushed over to whisper into

IT'S A WISE PARENT

my son's innocent ear that she'd be seeing him Thursday.

Hers had been one of those whimsical "won't-you-come-to-my-party" cards that mysteriously arrive by post or are brought home from school in a somewhat mangled condition and that might have been left by the wee people for all I know about the senders. My child receives a good many of these . . . not that he is especially in demand . . . he merely knows a large number of children who have not only birthdays but parents who are complete legends. Children's parties in New York are fast becoming a situation that isn't far behind the debutante racket and it wouldn't surprise me if those society impresarios who arrange the coming-out parties have up their enterprising sleeves a list, that may be purchased for a consideration, of eligible little boys between the ages of six and ten. These festivities not only cost the parents a penny that is definitely pretty, but they run the parents of the gift-bearing guests into no mean expense; and I consider my over-due bill at Schwarz's one more social outrage that should be righteously ignored.

Once, harboring the quaint notion that it might be a maternal duty to catch an inside glimpse of the houses to which my son has entrée, I committed

DITHERS AND JITTERS

the grim error of calling for him at a residence whose marble exterior and wrought-iron garage-door should have forewarned me of the exclusive nature of the juvenile goings-on within. A butler answered the bell. Butlers not only frighten, they have an over-refining effect on me, and I hear myself using the broad "a" on words like "hat." I murmured my son's name and the fact that I had come to fetch him. He took me for a governess and started in the direction of a waiting group of nursemaids when I managed to gasp out that I was the child's mother. This overt confession shocked him considerably and for a moment I wondered if I should send home for my marriage license. Reluctantly he led me up a staircase that can only be described as palatial and, opening a period door, thrust me into a room of complete darkness.

A movie was in order, but apparently I was not, for I was greeted by the whoops and cat-calls of fifteen small boys; and at least three yards of film were irrevocably censored before I collected my wits sufficiently to realize I was standing between the screen and the projection machine. There was nothing to do but drop to a crouching position. My eyes were by now getting focused the way they do in the Blue Grotto, and in the dusk I could dis-

IT'S A WISE PARENT

tinguish the familiar figure of my son raising his equally familiar brand of hell with another small fiend and over on a couch a pair of adults whom I presumed to be the parents of the child host. Their attitude was rather that of Lord Protector and Mistress of the Robes watching the gambols of infant royalty. Fearing to cut any more breathless moments of "Our Gang," I continued to crouch and approached their presence in a manner that was a definite throw-back to the Neanderthal Man. This startled them a good deal but what startled them most was my announcement that I was the mother of such-and-such a boy. Even in the gloom I could see "So what?" was written on their countenances.

It was all very well for the children, and quite *au fait* for the nursemaids waiting below, but for a parent to crash the gate was rank Communism! They managed to utter a few polite phrases and we all three simulated an animated interest in the film that was blessedly nearing its custard-pie finale. The lights flashed on and the party was pronounced over. Most of the guests beat it for the door; others, mindful of the waiting martinets below, remembered to thank Mr. and Mrs. X for a lovely time. I, too, thanked them in behalf of my offspring who after a number of violent pinches at which he first said

DITHERS AND JITTERS

"ouch" managed to mumble something that might be construed as appreciation. We then departed, I sheepishly, he triumphantly and with a considerable quantity of loot in the way of candy, favors, and, I later guessed, a few of the birthday gifts of the unsuspecting host.

Only once have I attempted giving a child's party in New York. Five little boys were invited (my son gave me the names and I believe he picked them by the "eeny-meeny-miney-mo" method) and, as a refining influence, three little girls. Knowing practically none of the parents I felt that along with the invitations I should at least send a few references and a health certificate. But New York parents are a trusting lot. As long as their children attend the same school or their Nanas gossip together in the park they ask no questions. Their little ones may be disporting themselves in the gilded halls of sin, for all they seem to care. The invitations were unanimously accepted. The day and the hour and the children arrived all at once. I hovered nervously about the front door. Remembering my own late experience, I wanted to prove, in case some child arrived accompanied by a mother, that here was one Gotham parent with neighborly instincts. This resulted in an over-effusive handshaking with a number of nursery

IT'S A WISE PARENT

governesses who clearly thought me demented but who none the less left their charges in my dubious custody.

With the forethought of the Georgia women burying their silver before the advent of Sherman, I had put away most bric-a-brac and sent the plants and the goldfish to spend a quiet day with a friend on the seventh floor. The dog, I figured, could defend himself and I took the chance of having to pay for a possible Pasteur treatment. Altogether there was little damage done except for the presence of a lolly-pop rammed into the piano strings and a spot on the ceiling caused by a flying butter-ball. The entertainment was simple . . . one or two games and supper. There was no movie and no magician and no one even pinned a tail on a donkey. In fact, to some of those jaded little ones it must have seemed a return to Jean Jacques Rousseau. There was complete bedlam during the games and an equally complete silence during supper which I understand is proof that the party was a hit. At the end several children said: "Aw, do we have to go now?" which made me think Elsa Maxwell had better look to her laurels. True, one young bounder informed me that at *his* party they had had Charlie McCarthy and a couple of trained seals. I told him to assure his

DITHERS AND JITTERS

parents that next time I'd see to it we had Paul Whiteman's band and Sally Rand, but I doubt if he delivered the message. The governesses with the precision of a Gilbert and Sullivan chorus arrived at six-thirty and the unknown children marched off to unknown homes to tell unknown parents that they'd had ice-cream.

My son retired to bed in a vile humor (another proof that the party was a wow) and I poured myself a drink fit for a log-roller. The telephone rang and the maid informed me that the mother of one of the children wished to speak with me. Here at last was someone with that same sturdy American sense of etiquette. I felt sure she was calling to thank me for my kindness to her child and said "hello" in a voice of honey. Someone with ill-concealed irritation announced she was Cynthia's mother. I remembered Cynthia and none too pleasantly. I had seen her surreptitiously disposing of her soup in the centerpiece and I suspected her of being the vandal who stuck the lolly-pop in the piano strings. The voice went on to say that Cynthia had returned home without her band.

"Her band?" I inquired incredulously. I was still thinking of Paul Whiteman.

"Yes," came the voice. "She takes it out when she

IT'S A WISE PARENT

eats. It must be in your house somewhere. Would you mind looking for it?"

With a shudder I said no, which I daresay I'd have said if she'd asked me if I minded looking for her uncle's upper set and added that I'd bring it by on my way out to dinner. I'm not good at finding things. I've never found a four-leaf clover and I only found a horse-shoe once because I sprained an ankle over it. Cynthia's band was no exception. I searched with avidity and dread. Somehow I had the feeling the thing might spring at me. My husband came home and asked with admirable forbearance what I was doing under the furniture. He, too, joined the search. It was the cook who found it, carefully wrapped in a paper napkin and deposited in an empty glass. One ruse of Cynthia's that hadn't worked. A repellent contraption of wire and silver, it looked like a surrealist exhibit or some part of an alarm-clock. I wrapped it tenderly in cotton and placed it in a box from Cartier's. Cynthia lives on Park Avenue in a pent-house I shall never see (although my child informs me he has been there). I left the box with the doorman, requesting him to see that Cynthia's mother got it immediately. I had it well timed and as I drove away I prayed with fervor that she'd open it at the table.





FLORAL PIECE

FLORAL PIECE



'M not a garden girl. I like flowers a great deal but they don't dominate my life. In other words, I can't tell a hardy annual from an effete perennial, and I've always thought convolvulus was something you sent for the doctor to stop. I guess I'm not sufficiently horticultured but to my mind calling good honest ivy *ampelopsis veitchii* is like calling Yale *Universitas Yalensis*. I can enjoy flowers quite happily without translating them into Latin. I can even pick them

DITHERS AND JITTERS

with success and pleasure. What, frankly, I can't do is arrange them.

Perhaps it's lack of equipment. One really requires one of those flower-rooms pictured in "House Beautiful" with marble counters, spigots shaped like dolphins, and endless shelves, vase-hued like a ceramics collection in a museum. My flower-room is the far corner of the butler's pantry (magnificent misnomer! No butler would ever own it) and then only when the maid will let me in. I am apt to hit on a time when the sink is cluttered with the last meal's dishes, and when once the flowers are placed on the wash-board there is no room for the vases. This is further complicated by the fact that I seldom seem to have any vases—or if I have, they're the sort you'd expect to find in a furnished flat at Far Rockaway. My vases (*sic*—very *sic*) are kept in a cupboard below the sink along with an assortment of cocktail shakers and what goes into them. This has led to some slight confusion in the past and I'm not sure that on certain occasions my choicer wedding presents haven't been used for stirring up Manhattans.

On opening the cupboard all that at first appears is an immense bucket-like affair of heavy modern glass that could only have been originally intended

FLORAL PIECE

for sunflowers or umbrellas. When filled with water it requires two people to lift it. For a time it looks as though the cocktail shakers and ice bucket would have to be put to emasculated use but I then recall a dark and seldom disturbed nook where, behind the crème de cacao and some strange magenta-colored liqueur I mean someday to try out on someone, is a collection of vases with a flat "a" (the ones with a broad "a" have long since vanished). I have no recollection of how I came by most of these unless years ago at Atlantic City I won them as Japanese ping-pong prizes. A few I recognize as unfortunate bursts of tourist enthusiasm and there's one that leaks but I never remember this until it does. There is also a whatsis made from a shrapnel shell and a little silver oddity that says "S. S. Leviathan." Faute de mieux, I drag them forth and set about filling them with the pretty posies.

The first procedure is to cut the stems. No matter if two minutes previously you yourself have cut them in the garden you must cut them again. And this brings up something over which I am gradually becoming psychopathic. I have never in all my life been able to keep a pair of scissors. Yearly I purchase scissors by the gross only to have them one by one disappear like seals from the Alaskan coast. It's quite

DITHERS AND JITTERS

unexplainable and I can only attribute it to witchcraft. This means that anyone cutting a cuticle in my house has to go about it with library shears, and when it comes to flowers all that's generally available is a pair of nail-scissors. With these I manage without much trouble to shoot bits of stem and leaves about the pantry, stop up the sink and, in case there's any of that dreadful asparagus stuff, to sprinkle it like chives in the sugar bowl and salt cellars.

Once cut, flowers must be arranged. I wish in that nostalgic time when I attended Camp Gitche Goomie they'd taught us flower-arranging. It would certainly come in handy now. And where has basket-weaving gotten me, anyway? When confronted with a supply of fresh-cut flowers, my impulse is to ram them into the first available receptacle, say "To hell with it," and walk off whistling. But that would hardly be feminine, and arranging flowers is one of those tenderly becoming gestures expected of us women—like mending socks or crying at weddings.

When the flowers are the fool-proof sort, like roses that look well no matter what they're put in, it's not so bad. When, however, it's a question of quaint and interesting blooms worthy of something better than the cut-glass affair Great-aunt Ida bought at the World's Fair of '98, I either haven't the knack or the

FLORAL PIECE

vases. In the first place I don't see how you keep certain flowers up. There is a variety of limp, self-effacing little posy that has an annoying way of waiting till you've accomplished the final touch, then suddenly, in an access of modesty, sinking down the neck of the vase and disappearing from view. Then there is a species infested with the mob spirit which, when for the sake of symmetry you decide to extract one, pulls all the rest out with it. Then there are some with stems like small telephone-wires (nasturtiums, for instance) that won't fit into anything unless you cut them so short they're virtually decapitated, and there's also a sort that will get kinks in itself so that it has to be re-cut to half the desirable length. Jonquils, narcissuses, and all spring flowers rouse in me the ambition to arrange them in shallow bowls in a manner worthy the windows of Wadley & Smythe.

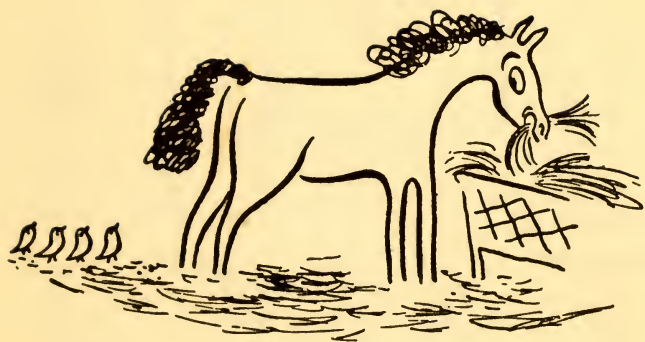
This necessitates the use of those curious gadgets one sets in water with a blind belief that they will hold flowers upright. My collection of these includes a bronze lily-pad, a rather lascivious pottery frog, and a wire contraption that looks as if it were intended for straightening the teeth of a horse. If, by the aid of these and some minor miracle I occasionally succeed in getting the desired effect, my triumph is short-lived. That frog has a nasty way of waiting till

DITHERS AND JITTERS

the last stem has been thrust into his back before turning over on his side, and the horse's band pulls the same dirty trick. As for the lily-pad, its perforations are too small to admit much of anything larger than a hare-bell and I don't get many of them.

If this all occurred in the pantry I might not feel so bitterly. But often as not I manage to get it all in place on the piano or whatever and retreat to admire my handiwork when, with a joint action like guardsmen saluting the colors, every last flower suddenly stands on its head, leaving the stalks in a picket-fence around the bowl. Then the whole thing has to be done over again and in the process a good deal of water gets sprinkled onto the furniture and the tooled leather guest-book and there's nothing to wipe it off with but my skirt and that's no help. Another mystifying annoyance is the fact that no matter how thoroughly you wipe off a vase in the pantry the moment you set it on a polished wood surface it breaks into a violent sweat that collects on the bottom, leaving an indelible ring.

I guess it all comes down to the fact that I don't really like to arrange flowers. If truth must be told I hate it and from the looks of the flowers that have had to go through the process I have an idea the feeling is mutual.







LONG AFTER
AUDUBON

LONG AFTER AUDUBON



AM the victim of intermittent attacks of ambition to patch up a faulty education. My ardor seldom lasts beyond the stage of purchasing a number of books on the passing enthusiasm, glancing over their contents, then putting them away with a vague promise to my inner man (who must be a complete sissy) someday to tackle the subject in earnest. The latest spell of intellectual thirst was brought about by the remark of a friend who, sitting on my porch, sud-

DITHERS AND JITTERS

denly exclaimed, "Why, I never realized you had pipits!"

It is definitely disturbing all at once to be told you have pipits. For an uncomfortable moment I thought she referred to some infirmity. Then when she said, "There it is, hear?" and when the only apparent sound was the squeak of a plank in the floor I wondered if she meant termites. However, her next remark, which was "Hear him? He's in that bush," brought the enlightening explanation that it was all about a bird.

"Oh, yes," I said with the complacency of the owner of a Derby winner. If she was going to show off I could too. "We have flocks of them."

"But they don't go in flocks!" My friend is definitely the annoying type.

"They do here," I countered, then added lamely, "This is a sort of bird sanctuary."

"How fascinating!" she cooed. (People who go in for fowls of the air after a while begin to talk like them.) "Just what species do you get?"

If she had pointed her finger at me and yelled "Bird 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8—" I couldn't have felt more panic-stricken. "Well, robins," I said, but this didn't satisfy her, so I added, "Sea-gulls and humming-birds and an occasional eagle. And now how about

LONG AFTER AUDUBON

an old-fashioned?"

Although my friend departed in haste she succeeded in sowing in me the bird-seeds of discontent. It being the season of migration the study of ornithology seemed not only imperative but rather becoming and I rushed to my bookshelves hopeful of finding a Chapman. I might as well have expected to find a first edition of Keats. The only book on the subject lurked in a section of childhood left-overs between a trot for Cicero and "The Automobile Girls in the Berkshires." A limp leather number about the size of a shorthand pad, it bore on the fly-leaf my signature and some cryptic initials in arrow-pierced hearts. For further ornamentation were the words "Yale, rah-rah!" in blue pencil and "Harvard, rah!" doubtless because the other end of the pencil was red. Going by one of those mortifying titles like "First Steps in Bird Lore," this booklet lists some fifty varieties of our winged neighbors. The illustrations, reproduced by an antiquated process of lithography in which the colors fail signally to get together, look a good deal like decalcomania that has skidded. As a result, the head of the goldfinch is dun-colored surrounded by a tender halo and the purple of the grosbeak's bill appears at a distance like a plum he's about to devour, while the scarlet dab

DITHERS AND JITTERS

that indicates the red-winged blackbird might be an overhanging traffic light. As a further drawback a number of pages have been ripped loose in some past period of rage and now flutter gaily in all directions whenever the little volume is opened.

This seeming hardly adequate, I consulted my bookseller who assured me he had just what I needed. What I needed turned out to be an opus the size of the Greater New York telephone book (including Brooklyn and the Bronx) and the weight of an anvil. It can't possibly be read in any such casual fashion as at breakfast on the table or in bed on the stomach. What it really requires is a pulpit or a bronze eagle. Once or twice, with scientific optimism I have lugged along this tome as an outdoor companion only to find that after manipulating its massive pages and dropping it in a series of dull crashes our feathered friends make for the next county and refuse to return until the book and I are back in the house.

The only way, therefore, to look up a bird is to go out and stare at it until your eyes get out of focus, then rush indoors picturing it over and over to yourself (like memorizing a date) and try to find something in the book that remotely resembles it. The chances are that after you think you've made

LONG AFTER AUDUBON

your find and are feeling pretty smug about it the thing listed in the book turns out to be an inhabitant of Arizona or Manitoba and what it's doing in Long Island only God and Audubon know. There must be some technique to looking up birds, like understanding hall-marks on silver. To begin with, you have to memorize them in a flash and if you think memorizing a bird is easy you'd better consult a psychiatrist. What's more, birds are utterly devoid of any spirit of cooperation and refuse to stand still and be memorized. Then in looking up a bird you have to guess what category he belongs in and to decide whether he's a warbler, a fly-catcher, a marsh-dweller or a totipalmated swimmer and if you can do that you probably know what the bird is anyway. How is the novice to tell? Warblers aren't always warbling, flycatchers are seldom catching flies, marsh-dwellers may be a long way from home, and as for those other things I don't even let myself think what they might be up to.

There is an exasperating little creature I've been trying for weeks to place and it looks as if in order to make any headway with him I'll have to follow him south. All I can determine is that he (or possibly she . . . God knows I'm not that far!) is smallish and of a color you call olive only because it isn't

DITHERS AND JITTERS

any color at all. It flits about in thick foliage and its note resembles the squeak of a shoe. The chances are it's either a red-eyed vireo, a pine siskin (immature), or a *Spizella Passerina Passerina* (the double name as in *Corona Corona* doubtless indicates a superior variety). The detailed descriptions are illuminating but don't get you anywhere. One of the above, for instance, is distinguished by a marking "dull whitish on the lower eyelids." To which all I can say is if a bird will stay still long enough to let you investigate its lower eyelid it'll stand for hours letting you put salt on its tail.

Another means of identification is by the detailed description of song. This is pretty bewildering. It may be all quite clear to the expert but to the novice who can recognize only the more obvious notes, such as those of the crow and the bob-white, the written equivalent of musical expression is hardly adequate. We are told, for instance, that the little codger is easily discovered by his cheery "tra-ree-rah, ree-rah-ree" and another goes "dzwee, dzwee, dzweetsee" while yet another says "chink" while flying and "chunk" when feeding, which seems fair enough. The sort that go in for catch-words like "Eat, Potter, eat" or "Sow wheat, Peverly, Peverly" I find difficult, due either to my lack of perception.

LONG AFTER AUDUBON

or the faulty diction of the Long Island varieties. Anyway, even the best authorities disagree. In the case of the olive-sided fly-catcher Thoreau thinks it says "till, till, till" while someone else describes it as "hip-pui-shee" and a gold miner claims it's "three cheers" (this may have been on Saturday night). I am constantly hearing one that has a shocking way of telling you to "bitch-it-up, bitch-it-up, bitch-it-up" but I don't find this listed. Instead, I learn that the song of the white-throated sparrow can best be approximated if "played with a very executed effect on the E string of a fine violin" and I don't know Heifetz well enough to ask him to play this for me. One amazing outburst of gladness is the happy voice of the yellow-breasted chat which goes (cross my heart, I'm not making this up) "crrr-rwhrr-that's it, chee, quack, cluck-yit, yit-now, hit it, tr-r-rwhen, caw, caw-cut, tea-boy, who-who-mew-mew." The book doesn't state whether or not at the end of all this the bird falls down in a faint.

A further handicap is, as in the case of an encyclopedia, the number of fascinating distractions that lure you far afield from what you're looking up. Start searching for some ordinary local variety of sparrow and on the way you'll come across such fabulous creatures as the *tufted puffin* (or is it a

DITHERS AND JITTERS

toasted muffin?), an ancient murrelet, and something that apparently doesn't get a break, being known as a *least auklet*. These congregate in the Bering Straits where "they are very playful and chase each other in great good will." Well, well! Oh, yes, another item of valuable information is that they feed on sea-fleas. Then there is something Lewis Carroll might have invented called an *oyster-catcher* and besides a *whip-poor-will* there seems to be a *poor-will*, both of which come under the distressing heading of *goat-sucker*.

One thing ardently to be wished is that the people who write about birds were not so blessed with the "keep smiling" spirit. Somehow, to learn that the nuthatch is the "small boy of the feathered world" or that the chipping sparrow is a "contented, modest little bird who tries hard to believe in the goodness of human nature even though he meets with but little encouragement" puts one off ornithology. That may be just an excuse for shelving my latest intellectual quest in my usual fashion. As a matter of fact, I have recently read an interesting article on Sumerian art.



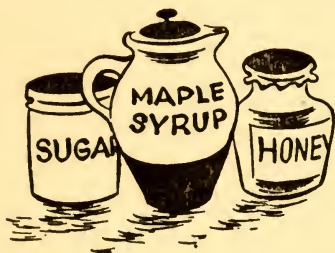




PARTY ON OLYMPUS

PARTY ON OLYMPUS

OR HOW THE GREAT GET TOGETHER ACCORDING
TO THE SCRIPT RADIO WRITERS



(The scene is in the Shell Chateau . . . or maybe it's the Mobiloil Mansion. Bing Crosby, Lily Pons, and Walter Winchell are giving a small family party to the Boswell Sisters, Major Bowes, and the Philadelphia Orchestra.)

BING CROSBY: Well, well, well, it certainly is fine to have all these folks with us here tonight. Don't you think so, Lily?

LILY PONS: It sure is, Beeng.

DITHERS AND JITTERS

BING CROSBY } Well, if it isn't Walter Winchell!
LILY PONS } Hello, there, Walter.

WALTER WINCHELL: Hello, there. Lily, you certainly are a sight for sore eyes.

LILY PONS: Sank you, Waltair. And you've an eye for sore sights.

EVERYBODY: Ha-ha-ha-ha!

MAJOR BOWES: Now, now, now, Lily! Enough is enough. Didn't I hear you singing something as I came in?

LILY PONS: Yes, Majeur, but I am afraid I 'ave not my music. If someone would be kind enough to improvise by ear . . .

DR. STOKOWSKY: I'll help you, Lily.

LILY PONS: Oh, sank you, Leopold.

(Dr. Stokowsky runs his hands over the Philadelphia Orchestra who immediately break out with the "Barber of Seville." While Lily Pons sings, Graham MacNamee enters. He has a plate of Jello in one hand.)

BING CROSBY: Well, Graham!

GRAHAM MACNAMEE: Well, if it isn't Bing!

BING CROSBY: If it isn't, I don't know who is.

PARTY ON OLYMPUS

GRAHAM MACNAMEE }
BING CROSBY } Ha-ha-ha-ha!

MAJOR BOWES: Well, well, well!

(Enter Kirsten Flagstad, Leslie Howard, and Yehudi Menuhin.)

EVERYBODY: Well, well, well!

WALTER WINCHELL: Hello, Kirsten.

KIRSTEN FLAGSTAD: Hello, Walter.

BING CROSBY: Hello, Leslie.

LESLIE HOWARD: Hello, Bing.

GRAHAM MACNAMEE: Yehudi, how do ye?

YEHUDI MENUHIN: First rate, thank you, Graham.

MAJOR BOWES: Well, now, that's first rate. You didn't by any chance bring along your fiddle, did you, Yehudi?

YEHUDI MENUHIN: Why, yes, Major, I believe I did. It's just here somewhere.

GRAHAM MACNAMEE: Well, now, Yehudi, after Lily here gets through with the Barber of Seville . . . that'll be a close shave! . . . *(The brasses of the Philadelphia Orchestra take time off to give him the raspberry.)* . . . perhaps you'll play these folks a tune. But first I'd like to ask if you've tried our

DITHERS AND JITTERS

delicious Sealtest ice-cream. You'll enjoy its smooth fruity flavor. Have some, Leslie.

LESLIE HOWARD: Thank you, not just now, Graham. I, for one, am enjoying a good slice of Ward's soft-bun bread. You know, Graham, the name of Ward is your guarantee.

(The whistle of a steamboat is heard and Charles Winninger enters with Molasses an' January and also Martinelli an' Judith Anderson.)

EVERYBODY: Well, well, well. This is a surprise!

CHARLES WINNINGER: Yes, indeed. You know, folks, we found there was a branch of the Mississippi leading right up to your front gate, so we tied up the old Show Boat and here we are.

BING CROSBY: That's splendid. Have some Texaco Fire Chief, Giovanni?

MARTINELLI: Thank you, Bing, I prefer to watch the Fords go by.

(Lily Pons has stopped singing. Molasses an' January tell a few stories. The Boswell Sisters sing "I've got you under my skin" while Yehudi Menuhin plays an obligato of the "Tales of Hoffmann." There is a good deal of wild applause that ends as suddenly as it starts.)

PARTY ON OLYMPUS

MAJOR BOWES (*in a loud voice*): Silence, please!
(*There is silence.*) Stand by, everybody, for station announcements.

(*This is a solemn moment. All bow their heads except Leslie Howard who looks exalted and the Boswell Sisters who sob quietly on each other's shoulders.*)

CHARLES WINNINGER (*breaking the tension*): How about a little dancing, folks?

BING CROSBY: O. K., Charlie.

(*He jerks aside a curtain behind which Rudy Vallee, Eddie Duchin, and Guy Lombardo have been hiding their orchestras in massed-band formation. There is a lot of good-natured laughter over this.*)

GRAHAM MACNAMEE: Hello, Rudy; hello, Eddie; hello, Guy.

VALLEE, DUCHIN, and LOMBARDO: Hello, Graham, and hello, everybody.

(*Applause. They all play different selections at once.*)

EDDIE DUCHIN: Well, folks, we've got a little surprise for you here.

DITHERS AND JITTERS

(He opens a bass-drum and out comes Frank Buck with a wild leopard that's still alive and Johnny Weissmuller. They laugh pleasantly and help themselves to glasses of Sal Hepatica that Gracie Allen is passing. The leopard doesn't like his and empties the glass surreptitiously on the carpet.)

(There enters a famous Viennese doctor. Applause.)

GRAHAM MACNAMEE: Folks, may I claim a minute of your time?

FOLKS: You may, Graham.

GRAHAM MACNAMEE: I just want you to let Dr. Schnitzelbein here tell you a little about the effect of yeast on sunburn.

(They let him.)

LESLIE HOWARD: What about a game of charades?

RUDY VALLEE: I have a better idea. Let's ask Judith here if she won't show us a little real acting.

JUDITH ANDERSON: Certainly, Rudy. Come on, Leslie.

(They step to the fore where they are met by James Cagney and two unknowns. They give a five-minute version of "Hamlet," "Mourning Becomes Electra," and "Alias Jimmy Valentine." Applause.)

(Eddie Cantor comes running in amid hurrahs

PARTY ON OLYMPUS

and huzzahs—the huzzahs being Roxy ushers. He sings a group of old favorites.)

CHARLES WINNINGER: Time to go home now, folks.

(He blows the steamboat whistle and Major Bowes sounds a gong. Kirsten Flagstad emits a cry of the Walkyrie which frightens the leopard.)

MEDLEY OF HAPPY VOICES: Good night, Charles. Good night, Judith. Night night, Walter. I'll be seeing you, Yehudi, etc. etc.

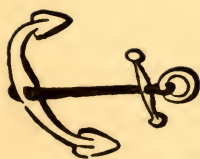
BING CROSBY: Well, folks, let's all meet again next week at the same hour. *(Cheers.)*

(Music, applause, and sound effects.)

GRAHAM MACNAMEE: Well, I for one would say your party went over like the new Buick!







BONNY
BOATING
WEATHER

BONNY BOATING WEATHER



HE older I get the more difficult I find it is to be sporting. As a matter of truth, I have always found it difficult. What I should say is that with increasing maturity I am beginning to realize that to assume an attitude of splendid animal enjoyment in situations of acute discomfort, not to say of peril, is childish and unnecessary. It is all very well for the very young or for the female who by exhibiting her fine out-door nature hopes to land her man. But for the woman

DITHERS AND JITTERS

past thirty who no longer goes in for such complicated forms of angling, it is so much easier to come clean and admit she prefers to remain on the chaise-longue in the cabaña.

Take sailing for example. There is no more enthusiastic salt than myself, provided the skies are fair and the boat that carries me is equipped with something a degree more comfortable to sit on than a cleat. But when the weather turns Cape Horny and the conveyance changes from a pleasure-craft into a submarine and there is nothing to hold on to but a scupper and the arm of the helmsman (a form of feminine approach that is not appreciated at the time) I for one prefer the "Queen Mary."

Perhaps it's not so much my nature as my anatomy that isn't adapted to the more primitive methods of navigation. I am not one who can sit for hours on a flat surface with my feet straight out before me. In fact, I can't sit that way for even a few seconds. I guess I'm lacking a joint because I don't bend. On the other hand (or rather on the other limb) to sit tailor-fashion on a heaving deck is not only precarious but extremely painful and my ankle-bones can't take it for long. If space permits, you can lie stretched out on the hatch but again the danger of being hurled overboard obviates any degree of relaxation.

BONNY BOATING WEATHER

Then there is the violent alternative of sitting astride the bow-sprit, which is just a picturesque version of the ducking-stool. Of course, you can go back and repose on one of those nice hard seats in the cockpit. Some well-equipped sail-boats have cushions, I am told, but the people who take me sailing either have lost their last one overboard or they're above such decadent luxury. Often as not I find myself sitting on the deck with feet dangling into the cockpit. This position of comparative comfort is ruined by the presence of a viciously sharp little rim that surrounds the edge for no apparent reason other than to give whoever sits on it for long a permanent wave in the wrong place.

Then there's the question of agility. Not only must one be able to spring, crawl, or fall flat at a moment's notice, there is any amount of hazards in the way of ropes that trip, hatches that become oubliettes, and surfaces that grow slippery as skating-rinks. Those sudden crises that arise when somebody, just to be capricious, decides to bring the boat about and you have to bend double or lean out over the brink of eternity to avoid being decapitated by the on-rushing boom require a talent of contortionism with which I am not endowed. I have yet to get comfortably settled in a sail-boat when someone hasn't

DITHERS AND JITTERS

yelled "Watch your head!" (as if watching it would do any good) and a menacing flail of wood canvas and rigging hasn't rushed past, missing me by inches and tilting me into a position of complete unbalance. In regard to that tipping, too, I guess I'm no true yo-heave-hoer, because when a boat leans at an angle of forty degrees and one side is well under water I have never been able to figure out what in hell keeps the whole works from going all the way under. This feeling gives rise to a good deal of straining on my part to pull the balance in the other direction, which is exhausting to the nerves, to say nothing of the abdominal muscles.

From a feminine point of view sailing is about as unbecoming an activity as woman can pursue. The idea of the wind-blown sweetheart of the crew is all very romantic and looks fine in the travel ads but in reality an hour or more of breeze and spray can turn an attractive well-groomed creature into something pretty alarming if not repellent. Hair, unless bound down with uncompromising severity, soon gets looking like a bunch of old kelp and what the salt air does to make-up is nobody's business, unless possibly Neptune's. Powder goes streaked and cakes in patches and under it one's nose acquires the hearty color of a port light while the rest of the face approaches a

BONNY BOATING WEATHER

more starboard shade. One more injustice of a man-made world is that the wetter a man gets the more it adds to his charms, while a wet woman assumes the forlorn aspect of a wet cat.

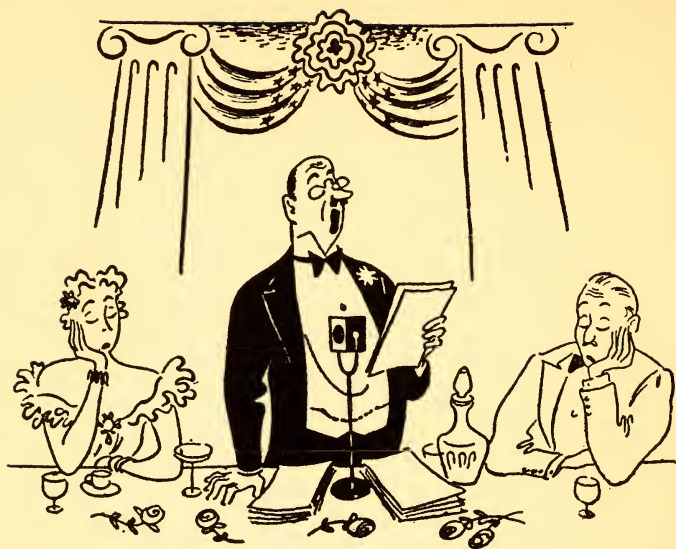
Another disadvantage for the sea-faring female is that while she is never permitted to take any part in the navigating, when it comes time for food she is expected to do her bit in a galley that would have turned the stomach of Henry Morgan. I suppose it's traditional to have everything connected with food on a sailing-boat as repulsive as possible but I do wish it weren't considered so darned sporting to keep all utensils in a state of grease, rust spots, and the dried remains of ancient baked beans. Then there seems to be a quaint misconception that a slight flavor of kerosene and wet bathing suits is conducive to appetite. Personally I prefer my butter free from flecks of pipe tobacco and I'm not nuts for bread that for a number of days has been wrapped in oil-skins. Under these distressing circumstances the gallant little woman is expected to let loose her domestic nature, concoct something in the way of a meal for the great bullies in the fresh air above, and come through the ordeal pink and cheerful and not at all in an advanced state of jaundice. I am an annoyingly good sailor. The channel in winter, a Chris-craft in a squall,

DITHERS AND JITTERS

the "Ile de France" in any weather fails to down me. But even on land I've never liked the combination of food and sneakers.

There are compensations for growing older. One is the realization that to be sporting isn't at all necessary. It is a great relief to reach this stage of wisdom. Hereafter I go boating only in fair weather when I can loll on soft cushions, sip cooling drinks, and keep up my appearance. All else I leave to the Joan Lowells. Not that anyone will be particularly interested in this announcement. It merely gives me satisfaction to make it.







PLATFORM PERFORMANCE

PLATFORM PERFORMANCE



NCE to nearly everybody comes the moment when he or she must sit on a platform. I am not referring to such times as one is called upon to speak or participate in any major way in the general goings-on. That is quite another hell and deserves a column to itself. I mean those occasions when one must sit passively for a couple of hours on a raised dais facing a large audience and taking no more part in the events of the day than one of the potted ferns or the draped Amer-

DITHERS AND JITTERS

ican flag.¹ You may be a delegate to something or a faculty member at commencement, or just a simple music-lover who discovers too late that the only way to hear Tibbett is to sit on a collapsible chair directly behind his back. The experience is the same. —

You start out being acutely aware of what is commonly known as a sea of faces but what in truth looks more like a collection of upturned, empty plates. For the first few moments you suffer the uncomfortable delusion that the eyes staring from the centers of these plates are focused directly onto you. This, however, is purely a manifestation of super-sensitive ego, because as a matter of fact they aren't focused on anything . . . or only for one brief moment as each new speaker takes his stand, the general attention turns in his direction, then breaks up and wanders here, there, and everywhere. Only a very few indicate they're even aware someone is addressing them. Some study their programs, some gaze with rapture at the ceiling, and some glare accusingly at the chair before them. To you sitting on the platform this gives a disturbing indication of some of the things you yourself are in all probability doing, so you pull yourself together and attempt to concentrate on the speaker. This is difficult. There is something about staring at the back of a neck

PLATFORM PERFORMANCE

that is conducive to anything but absorption in what is coming from the front of it. You find yourself indulging in thoughts that are inappropriate and unworthy. Instead of pondering on World Peace or Higher Education, you become aware you are speculating on just how much the rough edge of the speaker's collar is cutting into that roll of flesh that juts out over it, or why there should be a white thread dangling from under his coat, and whether he'd take it in the right way if you were to lean forward and pull it off.

It is nigh to impossible to concentrate when a couple of flies keep landing alternately on the pages of the written address or the orator's nose. And those pages themselves are a further distraction, because sitting where you are you can't resist counting them and figuring out just how much longer it is all going to last. Gradually, attention wanders from even the vicinity of the rostrum and in a state of reverie you turn back to survey the audience. After glancing over a number of them, you find that for no apparent reason you have singled out one particular face and are riveting it with an unwavering gaze. This eventually produces a disturbing reaction on the part of the owner of the face, who begins to fidget, straighten his tie, and give general indications of wondering what in God's

DITHERS AND JITTERS

name's the matter with him. With a twinge of remorse you look quickly away and give the poor wretch a moment or two in which to calm down, then before you know it there you are watching him again intently, with a stare that would have done credit to Mesmer. Not infrequently you realize that certain members of the audience are doing just that same thing back at you. So you try to look intently at nothing, a proceeding that in time has a curious effect on the eyes. Not only do they become incapable of focusing; they experience an irresistible impulse to cross. If you're over-sensitive you come to the panic-stricken conclusion that they have and that that's why the adenoidal youth in the second row is watching you with such fascinated amazement.

This brings you back with a jolt and, trying to do what is expected of you, with an expression of rapt attention you again face the speaker . . . that is, you turn your face in the direction of his rear. He, incidentally, may have just cracked a joke which you haven't at all heard but which, to judge by the forced laughter of its reception, has been about average, so you beam with animated appreciation. Or perhaps he has scored a moot point so aptly it evokes applause; you find yourself clapping happily and

PLATFORM PERFORMANCE

fervently without having the remotest notion why. Or again, if the expressions on some of the upturned plates are any indication, splendid sentiments are being voiced. You in haste look inspired and feel like a jack-ass. Only here you may be wrong. You may look like a jack-ass too.

Then there is the question of deportment. When I was a girl it was drilled into us that whoever crossed her legs was no lady. Try sitting for an hour or more without crossing your legs and you'd just as soon be a hussy. In the first place, remaining stationary with the feet set demurely side by side on the floor gives you not only a sense of rigidity but an extremely tentative look; and the minute you let yourself relax, the knees have an unfortunate way of spreading wider and wider apart. The effort of holding them together is pretty taxing and may produce a case of trembling that is viewed by your platform neighbor as an alarming indication of either extreme emotion or the beginning of a fit. Sooner or later you think to hell with being a lady and cross your legs. This does fairly well for a time until the strain of immobility starts some muscle mysteriously twitching and you look as if you were testing your own knee-jerks.

Among other horrors (although this may apply

DITHERS AND JITTERS

only to the more neurotic type of spectator) are the recurrent attacks of surprising and idiotic impulses. These start, casually enough, by wondering quite harmless things, such as what would happen if you were to kick off your shoes, or stick your tongue out at some benign old lady in front, or rise suddenly and kiss the speaker. Such playful speculations are moderately amusing until it occurs to you that they may become irresistible obsessions that you won't be able to control. The mental picture of yourself kissing the speaker keeps intruding itself and, cold with sweat, you decide that in this grim event the best thing to do will be to pretend to faint and get carried out before you're thrown out.

— Thus the time goes by—only not so as you'd notice it. You continue to wool-gather, to stare at that one face in the audience, to nod and smile vague approval. The while the knee-jerks, the eye trouble, and those neurotic impulses continue as an under-current that isn't any too far under at that. You develop itches that you don't dare scratch. Then you do when you think nobody's looking—but somebody always is. Eventually the words "in conclusion" come like music to the ear, giving you hope and promise and curiously enough inspiring you actually to listen to the last two minutes of the address. You

PLATFORM PERFORMANCE

join the rest in applause which, in your relief, is rather overdone. Then you rise and, except for a brief and painful moment when you discover your feet have gone to sleep (an appallingly false expression, because they feel much more as if they'd turned into wire brushes), your agony is over.

I daresay I'm being ungrateful even to suggest that being asked to sit on a platform, which is regarded as a considerable honor, is not one of life's amenities. Personally I'd just as soon pass up this particular form of tribute and remain a nonentity out in front.







"THE SKIN-GAME"



"THE SKIN-GAME"



IT'S not that I don't want to be a beauty, that I don't yearn to be dripping with glamour. It's just that I can't see how any woman can find time to do to herself all the things that must apparently be done to make herself beautiful and, having once done them, how anyone without the strength of mind of a foreign missionary can keep up such a regime. To read the accounts in the fashion magazines of the well-known It-girls and all the elaborate pains they take to make themselves a menace to

DITHERS AND JITTERS

every happy home; how they pat their chins with one kind of cream, rub their temples with another, apply lip-rouge with a Japanese paint brush, and sit for hours with their elbows in fragrant oil is indeed inspiring, but one wonders how they manage to get it all in. Maybe they don't do anything else. Maybe they don't receive urgent phone-calls at the moment they're about to apply an egg-mask. Maybe they don't have husbands who when they're in the midst of a little retiring facial yell out, "Aren't you ever coming to bed?" And maybe those same husbands on beholding them creamed and anointed for the night don't utter cries of pain and tell them to go wash their faces. Or maybe (a nasty suspicion) they're just natural beauties anyway and don't really do half the things they get the credit for.

I try. I even have a fair supply of the wherewithal to make me beautiful . . . all manner of facial junk, most of which, be it known, has been purchased under duress. About three times a year I go in for one of those sybaritic debauches known as a "facial." I do it because while it may not lift my face it does my morale. In other words, it makes me feel like a kept woman. To recline on silken cushions in a boudoir fit for Peggy Hopkins Joyce while a creature who might be Miss 1938 slathers and pats and strokes the

"THE SKIN-GAME"

face with scented creams and lotions is sheer opiate bliss. It is very helpful if the cook has walked out, or if that Englishman you met last summer has just written to say he's coming over with his new wife, or if a Harvard senior tells you he likes you so much because you remind him of his mother. It is when I am in a thus vulnerable state that the young lady who has me in her fingertips starts her sales talk. (She gets a *cum laude* if she sells over twenty dollars' worth.)

She begins by asking me just what I've been using on my face in a tone that implies she suspects it's "Dutch Cleanser." She tells me what my skin cells are crying for (the realization is touching) is their new "Wonder Crème," composed of water lilies and the female glands of South American turtles. She then dabs on something that feels and smells the way Marlene Deitrich looks, explaining how it purifies the pores, turns wrinkles into dimples, and creates such sex-appeal it can be employed only sparingly. It must be used, she insists, in conjunction with their "Gland Stimulant," which does everything for you short of teaching you the "Big Apple." On learning the price, I croak that I guess I'll just take the "crème"; but implying, oh, so politely, that I'm a cheap-skate, she explains that the

DITHERS AND JITTERS

one is no good without the other (like Seidlitz powders). Further to weaken me she suddenly comes across some humiliating blemish, at sight of which she gasps, shakes her head, and makes me feel she's discovered cooties.

"How long," she asks, "since you've used our 'Contouration Balm' for spots?" She might as well ask how long since I've used a tree-toad for warts, but she shames me into a further purchase.

Then I'm covered in thick layers of goop and gently mauled until I almost forget myself and fall asleep. But no. She was just waiting to catch me unawares. Sneaking up from behind, suddenly she clamps some pungent cloth over my face, ties it tightly under my chin, over my head, around my ears. I can't swallow. I can't see. There's one fearful moment when I'm afraid I can't breathe. And she cheerfully goes away and leaves me in this strait jacket. In panic I wait. Suppose there's a fire. Suppose she's gone to lunch. Suppose she got a 'phone call that her little sister's sick and she's gone home and won't remember me till late tonight. Suppose she just doesn't care. As I am about to ring bells to summon either manager or fire department, back she comes just as though nothing had happened.

When I leave I take with me a collection of

"THE SKIN-GAME"

creams, lotions, and fragrant junk that not only costs me a pretty penny but that in all probability will remain on my bathroom shelves, decorative but quite unused.

For to give myself a series of home facials requires not only time but strength of mind, and I haven't either. Whenever I do plan to lie down for half an hour with a mud-pack on my face and pads on my eye-lids, the phone rings. There is something about trying to talk on the phone with pads on my eyes that has a disturbing effect upon my powers of speech. Nor is my conversation the only thing that gets tangled. The wires of the telephone, the bed-light, and the electric clock suddenly form themselves into a deep tangled wildwood which ends in one or all three crashing to the floor. Or if the phone doesn't ring somebody drops in to call, or my child enters and on seeing me screams with fright, or my husband returns unexpectedly and says, "What in the name of sweet gentle God are you doing?" Then I find that a "complete home beauty treatment" requires a lot of paraphernalia that I haven't always got.

It is all so complicated with the various creams that must be used along with certain others. I once, in the spirit of defiance, used a particularly fiery

DITHERS AND JITTERS

blotch-cure that apparently had a base of mustard and carbolic without removing it with the specified oil. As a result I turned, and remained for half a day, a deep shade of garnet. At sight of me, mothers drew their children away and I'm not sure that one or two didn't notify the Board of Health. As for those eye-pads, either I don't know how to use them or the skin about my eyes is of the same consistency as those Japanese flowers that swell up when they're wet. After using them I rush to a mirror expecting to see a starry-orbed vision only to be confronted by something that could be considered a beauty only in Lapland.

However, I continue to have spasmodic attacks of beauty culture, brought on, largely, by the cosmetic ads for which I am a complete sucker. These fall into two lines of sales talk, the "glamour" and the "scientific." The former presents the picture of some ravishing creature in an attitude that implies she's about to be yet more ravished. And in the blurb below, which is the "tropic-seas-night-of-love" sort of thing, the purchaser of the product is assured of romance, seduction, and general hell-raising. In fact, with every jar comes a free ticket down the primrose path. In the "scientific" ad we see an enlargement of the cutaneous and sub-cutaneous layers

"THE SKIN-GAME"

revealing those hungry little cells clamoring for their morning cosmetic and, below, the photograph of a famous Viennese doctor who has consecrated his life to making a perfect complexion within the reach of every woman. After years of research he has hit upon an ingredient that can be likened in importance only to the discovery of radium . . . something with an imposing name like "ichthyosaurus." They then give the prescription which might be a prescription for horse liniment for all I know, but it's impressive. And that extra ten bucks meant for the Savings Bank goes into a jar of "Viennese Miracle" (or what have you), which in all probability I shall never find time to use.

One never-ending joy about these products is the wording of the directions that accompany them. The face is not cleaned, it is *cleansed*. A skin softener is said to be *satiniizing* and an aid to circulation is a *muscle toner*. Rejuvenating has been supplanted by the incredible word *youthifying* and even an old-fashioned pimple is referred to with averted eyes as an *acne condition*. Ah me! It is all very refined and most exquisite and I wish I could manage to fit it all in! Sometime I'll knock off all other activities for a month and try.



VAULTING AMBITION



VAULTING AMBITION



AM the owner of a strongbox—or, rather, I rent one from a bank. I don't do much about it, nor does the bank, but every now and then I remember my box and decide to pay it a visit. There is generally a lapse of a couple of days between the time of my decision and the actual visit, owing to the fact that it takes me that long to find my key. After every trip I put the key in a new hiding place, where it is perfectly safe—even from me. It turns up, however,

DITHERS AND JITTERS

when I'm in the midst of looking for something else and with considerable triumph I bear it down to the bank. I find that just to enter a bank with the purpose of going to the vault raises my morale; the instant I go through the outer gate to the safe-deposit department, I acquire a sensation of importance, which increases as I go down the stairs leading to the vault, and I step firmly on the tread which sets off a warning bell. Indeed, I feel that the alarm system, instead of merely ringing a bell, should play an impressive theme song in honor of my entrance.

The removal of my box is the occasion for a good deal of ceremony. At the foot of the stairs is waiting a gentleman who bows with dignity. I, too, bow and, after a few minutes of desperate plunging into my purse, hand him my key. He bows again and ushers me to a steel-barred gate that is opened by a uniformed guard, whose salute I acknowledge with the air of royalty incognito. Once inside the vault (which always terrifies me, because I was conditioned in childhood by a performance of "Alias Jimmy Valentine"), we are met by a third gentleman, who bows and to whom the first gentleman hands my key. We all bow again and the first gentleman withdraws. This is impressive and it would continue to be so were it not for the fact that mine is

VAULTING AMBITION

the most humble variety of box in the bank. There is a limited number of these small boxes, skied modestly tier on tier above the more opulent treasure caskets below, and they can be reached only by ladder.

When extracted, my box looks so woefully small and thin that one wonders how there can be anything in it. A fourth henchman, a youth this time, comes up, bows, of course, and takes the box. His deportment is so page-like I always suffer the curious hallucination that he's carrying a red velvet cushion on which my poor little strongbox is perched like a coronet. With heraldic step he leads the way down a corridor, stops before a door, opens it, bows again, and ushers me into a small private room, where he leaves me, making his exit with a final bow. I take off my coat and gloves, sit down, and, feeling a good deal like Pandora, open the box. The contents are invariably a shock. The ceremony attendant upon the box's removal has somehow built up the fantasy that I shall find it filled with doubloons and pieces of eight. It is in the nature of a blow, therefore, to be faced at the outset by my own last will and testament. Beneath this grim document lies a modest insurance policy, and beneath that a deed for some land that no one has ever wanted to live on and no

DITHERS AND JITTERS

one will ever want to buy. Next comes an envelope containing my child's birth certificate. Modestly lurking under this hodgepodge is a small, apologetic bunch of bonds.

I spread them out with considerable suspense, owing to the fact that I never remember when the coupons are due. Since there are only four months in the year in which any of my coupons are collectible, it frequently happens that I find myself in the vault during one of the eight intervening months. This is awkward. It would be humiliating to ring at once for the pageboy to bear my unproductive box back to its niche. Fortunately there are a number of ways of whiling away the time. Neatly arrayed on the writing shelf is a tempting assortment of stationer's supplies—pencils, pens, clips, scratch pads, scissors, and a magnifying glass. Also, some fascinating pins that resemble tiny polo mallets. The little pads are fine for shoppings lists. The larger ones can even be utilized for informal correspondence, and for further diversion one can play with the magnifying glass and practice silhouette-cutting with the nice sharp scissors. (Perhaps now is as good a time as any to come clean with something that has been weighing not particularly heavily on my conscience

VAULTING AMBITION

for some years: I always help myself to a fair supply of clips, rubber bands, pencils, and pen points. I also often collect some of those polo-mallet pins, although I never know what to do with them afterward. Nor am I above making off with a pad or two, and I pass up the scissors and the magnifying glass only because they won't go into my bag. If the banks are noting a shortage in their stationer's supplies, let them look to their lady boxholders.) There's a phone in the room, and this serves as a great time-killer, although I find I have a certain hesitancy in using it to make appointments at the hairdresser's.

Sometimes, with the sense of discovering an early crocus, I come across a bond with coupon due. I attack it with excitement and the scissors. (I can't manage that triangular razor gadget without mangling bond, coupon, and my thumb.) Then comes the complication of filling out the ownership certificate, the coupon-deposit envelope, and the deposit slip. I have to decide first of all which of the two varieties of ownership-certificate blanks to use. The prettier is of pale-green paper, but it is headed "Ownership Certificate—To Be Used by a Non-Resident Alien, a Foreign Partnership, or Corporation," and since I am neither an alien nor a foreign partnership,

DITHERS AND JITTERS

I discard it in favor of the plain-white blank—"To Be Used by a Citizen or Resident Individual, Fiduciary, or Partnership." This legend interests me chiefly because I have always believed that word was "fudiciary" and I still think it is.

I start to fill in the blank, and at the outset all is smooth sailing: "Owner of Bonds," "Street," "City," and "State." Then comes the hitch, for the next thing that meets the eye is "Debtor Corporation." So they're in debt, are they? And that elegant young salesman who sold me the bond told me it was as safe as the Bank of England! On the next line it says "Address." How do you go about finding the address of a bond? I scan the back of the bond itself. It is engraved with a lot of impressive stuff, but nothing that can be construed as an address. Then I try to make out what's printed on the coupon, which is like trying to decipher the Lord's Prayer on the head of a pin. With the aid of the magnifying glass, I come across the words "Payable in the Borough of Manhattan." So I write "Borough of Manhattan," which seems inadequate and rather hard on the postman. Next comes "Name of Bond." For a number of years I used to try to answer this question by describing the bond with replies like "Green bond" or "Yel-

VAULTING AMBITION

low bond with a locomotive coming at you head on," but I've been told that's not enough. I therefore now copy off everything that's on the back of the bond, without the remotest idea of what any of it means. The general drift of it seems to be about first mortgages, Series A, gold dentures—no, debentures—and the year the bond comes of age, which will be when I'm the oldest inhabitant of the Actors' Home. All this information takes up not only its own line on the certificate-of-ownership blank but also the "Date interest was due" line, which is just as well, because I wouldn't know about that. Next comes something entitled "Classes of Interest Payments." It begins, "Without tax-free covenant or with tax-free covenant," which sounds all very Biblical but which on further perusal succeeds in making no sense, and I ignore it completely. Over to one side is a rather discomfoting bit to the effect that I swear "the information entered hereon is correct," but I sign my name with bravado.

The ownership certificate is not the end of it. There is a coupon envelope to be reckoned with and on it a question that might be a quote from a College Board exam, reading, as it does, "Kind of Coupons Enclosed. (Give name of Corporation and de-

DITHERS AND JITTERS

scription of issue.)” The part dealing with the amount deposited I find rather humbling, as mine usually reads:

HOW MANY	VALUE OF EACH	TOTAL VALUES
<u>I</u>	<u>\$13.33</u>	<u>\$13.33</u>
	TOTAL	\$13.33

But I fill it out with satisfaction, enclose my one coupon, make out a deposit slip (which repeats most of the information already on the coupon envelope), close the box, and ring for the page.

The ceremony of returning the box to its resting place is the reverse of the removal service. Throughout it I endeavor to have the complacent look of someone who has just realized several thousand dollars' worth of income. The gentlemen of the vault, who are the soul of tact, never by so much as a muscular twitch betray the fact that they know better. But the prince of them all is the receiving teller upstairs. He knows me by now, and what's more, he knows my way of making out coupon certificates. He merely smiles and with saintlike patience gets out a fresh ownership certificate, which he fills in with speed and accuracy, never once hinting that

VAULTING AMBITION

mine is inadequate. That man may have me any time, although after years of familiarity with my banking methods it's a wild hope to think that he would even consider it.







**"ALLOW ME,
MADAME"**

"ALLOW ME, MADAME"



AM no feminist. I don't for one second think that woman is man's equal and the mere idea of a brave new world in which we all work shoulder to shoulder, even cheek to cheek, with those admirable creatures fills me with boredom and dismay. I don't want to do man's work. I don't even want the vote. I do, however, yearn to be permitted certain privileges that for some curious atavistic reason the male of the species regards as his prerogative.

First of all, I want to be allowed to fix a fire. I may

DITHERS AND JITTERS

not do it particularly well, but that's because I'm hardly ever given a chance to try. Never in all my life have I made an attempt to light, rearrange or even poke a fire that some man hasn't leaped to his feet and with a "Let me do that" snatched the implements from my reluctant hands and spoiled all my fun. It's not as if the fire were in need of repair. It is usually blazing quite adequately. The impulse to poke has been purely aesthetic. Evenings when my husband has been dozing deeply and audibly I've tried sneaking up on a fire, but it's no use. The first click of the tongs rouses him into the frenzied action of a volunteer fire-chief at the first alarm and with a virile "this-is-man's-work" look he goes for a luscious ember I myself have been itching to hack at. There have been times I have waited until I was certain of being alone before indulging any Camp Fire girlish proclivities and even then some male appears like a phantom from "Macbeth," says "I'll do that for you" and does. And what's worse, I have to thank him. It's like thanking someone for eating your crêpes suzette for you.

Another example of masculine dominance is in regard to the radio, particularly when it's a question of short-wave. Let us take a hypothetical couple which, not to hurt anyone's feelings, we shall call

“ALLOW ME, MADAME”

Mr. and Mrs. Smith. The radio supposedly belongs to them both, only Mr. Smith has gradually built up the legend that it's as much his personal property as his shaving outfit and is as shocked at the idea of Mrs. Smith's playing it evenings he's home as if she were suddenly to light up one of his best Corona Coronas. Mrs. Smith, incidentally, may not have her husband's technical knowledge of what makes a radio work, but she is averagely intelligent and knows how to tune in on all the leading stations. She has even been able to get London and Havana and can do quite nicely on police calls—that is when Mr. Smith is not there. He, be it said, doesn't believe she can and there is no way of her proving it for the simple reason that she is never allowed to do so. The moment Mrs. Smith approaches the radio, Mr. Smith with the tolerant manner of someone talking to the local idiot intercepts her with:

“Tell me what you want, dear, and I'll get it for you.”

Mrs. Smith, who has no idea of what she wants and whose motive in turning on the switch has been prompted solely by a mild spirit of investigation, says she just wonders what was doing.

“Doing?” says Mr. Smith in a hearty voice as if he, as host, had arranged it all. “Why, there's lots

DITHERS AND JITTERS

doing." At which, after a few static cracklings and other sound effects he stops the dial at some big-hour station where something is just over and all that can be heard at the moment is a colossal roar of applause.

"That what you wanted?" asks Mr. Smith.

"Well, I don't know," says Mrs. Smith. "I just wanted to see what I could find."

"Tell me what it is and I'll find it for you." The restrained patience in Mr. Smith's voice begins to take on a disturbingly Basil Rathbone tone, so Mrs. Smith says meekly, "Oh, anything," whereas Mr. Smith starts rapidly turning the dial, pausing at each station only long enough to permit a burst of unintelligible blither at which he says, "How about that?" and, before Mrs. Smith can answer, immediately turns on to the next. Now and then he pauses at something particularly awful and, as Mrs. Smith vouchsafes no comment, leaves it going for a time before he exclaims, "That's terrible," an estimate Mrs. Smith endorses with enthusiasm; whereat Mr. Smith for some unaccountable reason says, "I thought that was what you wanted"—then adds, "There's nothing good tonight," and whisks happily past a symphony concert, Kirsten Flagstad and a special message from the Pope, stopping finally at a broadcast of the dinner of the Parents' League and

“ALLOW ME, MADAME”

again asking if that was what she wanted. Mrs. Smith, hoping to smooth things out, suggests finding out what's on the short-wave—which is what she herself has been wanting fervently to do all along. This shows great wisdom on Mrs. Smith's part. Being asked to work a short-wave radio seems to be a definite sop to masculine vanity. It makes them feel superior, like asking them to let you feel their biceps. Mr. Smith, concealing his delight at the suggestion, turns the switch and says as if he were offering a choice of drinks, “What'll you have? Paris? Berlin? Buenos Ayres?”

Mrs. Smith, who by now doesn't care what she has, murmurs, “Whatever you like, dear,” in a saint-like manner that is lost on Mr. Smith who snaps, “Well, which?” pretty testily and Mrs. Smith, thus cornered, says, “Well, Berlin,” although by now she'd just as soon have quiet. The radio thereupon proceeds to emit a series of interesting sounds, most of which remind Mrs. Smith of the last time she took gas. Suddenly there is the dash-dot-dash of a wireless at which Mr. Smith pauses and in a voice of melodrama says, “That's a ship at sea.” For several seconds they listen reverently, although it secretly occurs to Mrs. Smith that neither of them understands Morse and that in all probability the message reads,

DITHERS AND JITTERS

"Landing tomorrow please bring money love Baby" which keeps this from being as impressive as it might be. At last there are faint strains of a distant dance-orchestra which after a little manipulating become louder and enable Mr. Smith to say, "There's Berlin for you," as if it were a box of Page and Shaw. "Probably the Adlon," he goes on to say. "The good old Adlon" (incidentally he has never stayed at the Adlon); then, for the sake of atmosphere, murmurs dreamily, "Unter den Linden."

The music ceases and after a bit a man's voice offers the depressing information that he is the Ten Eyck Hotel in Albany. The effect of this is to make Mr. Smith furious at the Ten Eyck Hotel and to demand how in hell it got there. Mrs. Smith in her wisdom says nothing. She doesn't even hint, although she's itching to do it, that by turning the dial a hair's breadth to the right one may switch magically from the Hudson to the Rhine. Mr. Smith considers it a face-saving necessity to explain in language understandable only to Marconi how it is possible to get a long wave on a short one and thus listen to Newark although you're tuned in on Honolulu. He fiddles some more and there are more anaesthetic effects and then all of a sudden Mexico City blares forth in an animated rhumba and Mrs. Smith says, "There!

“ALLOW ME, MADAME”

What's the matter with that?" But Mr. Smith has now adopted a Calvinistic attitude.

"You asked for Berlin, didn't you? Well, you're going to get it." By this time Mr. Smith is mad. He is mad at the radio, he is mad at the German people and he is particularly mad at Mrs. Smith. His mood affects his touch and for some minutes he is unable to produce anything but what would seem to be the shrieks of souls in purgatory. Finally the impeccable diction of the BBC comes with the soothing announcement that Big Ben is about to strike the hour and Mrs. Smith exclaims that this is what she's wanted all along and that Germany's probably signed off for the night anyway and the sanctity of the home is saved.

One can't perhaps feel quite so bitterly about the other things that men won't let us do as, unlike fires and the radio, they hardly come under the heading of pleasures denied. But here again there's no explaining the why and wherefore. Why, for instance, is it a foregone conclusion that time-tables are something "for men only" and that it is unmanly or ungallant or un-something to stand by and allow a woman to look up a train? This might not be so tiresome if the man wouldn't always adopt the attitude that the woman isn't quite bright. I pride my-

DITHERS AND JITTERS

self on being rather expert at reading time-tables. I can tell at a glance whether you read them down or up and I even understand those archeological little signs that indicate whether the train carries a diner or a "buffet-lounge," but I'm never permitted to prove it. Start opening a time-table in the presence of a gent and again that "Allow-me-Madame" spirit comes upon him. He grabs the sheet from your hand, losing the correct place you've already found, and starts groping either among the pages of "stations listed in this folder" or the pictures of Nature's Beauty Spots in the back. In my case the situation is further complicated by the fact that most of my gallants have reached the time of life when not only do they grab for the time-table, they have also to grab for their glasses. And all the while they're adjusting these with one hand and making a mess of the time-table with the other, one must stand by and look grateful and fragile and dumb. It's very trying.

The same thing applies to road-maps and to names in the telephone book. The average woman is just as speedy as the average man at finding what she's looking for in the 'phone directory, but it would be a bitter blow to masculine pride to let it be known. As for road-maps, to admit that a mere woman can understand them is as bad as confessing she knows

“ALLOW ME, MADAME”

and understands all the jokes of the last Dutch Treat Club show.

Again (and here I may run afoul of Emily Post who will say I don't know my social onions) it seems a bit unjust that when a woman is giving a theater party, for which she herself has bought the tickets, she is not permitted the satisfaction of handing them to the usher. Try as she may to act like a hostess, as she approaches the door, whatever man is nearest her will snatch the bits of cardboard from her outstretched hand and himself turn them in with the indulgent look of Uncle Fred taking the children to the circus. And while I am about it I might as well admit that it irks me slightly to find myself considered incapable of manipulating a door-key.

I am not complaining. I am quite willing to relinquish the keys, the time-tables, the road-maps and the 'phone books to my mental and physical superiors. I don't even resent their “let-me-give-the-conductor-the-nickel” attitude in the theater. But I would like, before I die, or before I reach the age when it doesn't matter a hoot what sex I am, just once to poke a fire.





EAR,
NOSE AND
THROAT



EAR, NOSE AND THROAT



UST in case anyone is interested in going along with me, I wish to announce that I'm thinking of starting a "Society for the Prevention of the Behavior of Throat Specialists." Just why the physicians who deal exclusively with

ear, nose and throat (there is a more scientific name for them but it sounds confusingly like the term for a bird-lover)—why they should consider themselves privileged to treat their patients as if they were a bunch of Washington petitioners is as bewildering as

DITHERS AND JITTERS

why their clientele are saps enough to put up with it. Make an appointment with a dentist and he sees you at the stated time with a precision by which you may set your watch. Make an appointment with a throat specialist and not only are you in luck if he sees you within an hour, the mere notion of asking for a definite time is met with shocked amazement. You may have a day full of vital engagements, there may be trains to catch, your business may be going to pieces in your absence for all he cares. You have to go there and bide your turn.

The throat specialist's waiting-room is a menace to health and soul. Having phoned for a special appointment, you arrive on the dot only to find the place over-flowing with others who have made similar appointments for the same dot. They all appear to be in advanced stages of the most perniciously contagious respiratory diseases. As you enter, they glare at you and indicate their animosity with a barrage of coughs, sneezes and vocalized blowings. The young lady who acts as nurse, secretary and chief keeper-outer is absent from the room. You stand at her deserted desk, hoping she has only stepped out for a moment and will be back directly. After five minutes this becomes awkward and you decide to find a chair near the door that opens on the inner

EAR, NOSE AND THROAT

office. This is sheer optimistic insanity. Not only is there no chair near the door, there is no unoccupied seat in the room. All that is left is a settee in front of the window that serves also as a radiator-cover.

There is no alternative but to settle there, having first selected a magazine from the table. The patients ahead of you have already grabbed all current periodicals and you are left with a choice of a four-month old "Atlantic Monthly," the "Annual Report of the American Medical Society" and a "National Geographic" entirely devoted to fish. Shyly lurking beneath these is a mangled copy of "Screen Romances," doubtless left behind by some less intellectual client. Ignoring the probability of the germs cavorting about on its much-thumbed cover you take it to the radiator seat. This proves to feel the way the hot-dish counter of a cafeteria looks, but you endure it, soothed by the hope that the young lady of the appointment-desk will appear any minute and "slip you in" as she has falsely promised to do. Eventually she appears, all right, but all she does is to stick her head past the threshold for a swift glance about the room that gives the impression of efficiency but in reality takes in no one.

The occupants look up with expectancy. Some try to attract her attention by coughing pitifully,

DITHERS AND JITTERS

others smile in a hideously friendly manner, but she's not to be lured. She looks back over her shoulder into the forbidden chamber, says "Yes, doctor," although no one is heard to address any remarks to her, and vanishes as suddenly as she has appeared, leaving the patients to eye one another with malevolent suspicion. These waiting-rooms are a hatchery for hatred as well as germs. There is usually some nasty little woman keeping watch near the doctor's door with the defiant manner of a goal-keeper. She lets it be generally understood that she's next in turn and whether she is or not manages to dive in ahead of everybody else. The air teems with mistrust. All have the attitude of the early squatters waiting for the rush into the Cimarron, determined at revolver point, if necessary, that no one is going to put anything over on them. This unpleasant manner strikes you as outrageous until some newcomer enters and you immediately join the ranks of the aggressively suspicious.

You wait amid churchly silence broken only by the conscientious coughers who in the interests of the doctor's practice seem to feel they must do a little intermittent bacteria-spraying. The door of the inner office might be the door to a tomb were it not for the occasional noises that give evidences of life behind it.

EAR, NOSE AND THROAT

After countless hours of experience you learn by these sounds to gauge the time allotted to each victim. The procedure is almost uniformly the same. After each patient has passed through the portal with an "Abandon-hope-all-ye-who-enter" look, the door closes and there is heard a distant murmur of voices. Although the words are undistinguishable this is presumably the doctor inquiring into the client's symptoms and the latter replying. As the conversation, however, continues for an unreasonably long time you come to the bitter conclusion that they have switched from the larynx to the European question, are venting their feelings about the administration and exchanging a few dirty stories. The rumble of voices eventually stops and there is a pause. Then comes the sound of a gag (oesophageal, not theatrical) followed by a distant "a" and sometimes an "e" (never an "i," "o," or "u"). If the doctor is in a musical mood a second "e" is repeated an octave higher. Then comes a second rather violent gag, followed by a silence so ominously prolonged you wonder if you hadn't better notify the police. Eventually there is a whir of an electric motor and the hiss of a spray. At the sound of spraying hope revives.

Then a final gag with a few strangling effects thrown in for an encore and you can count on the

DITHERS AND JITTERS

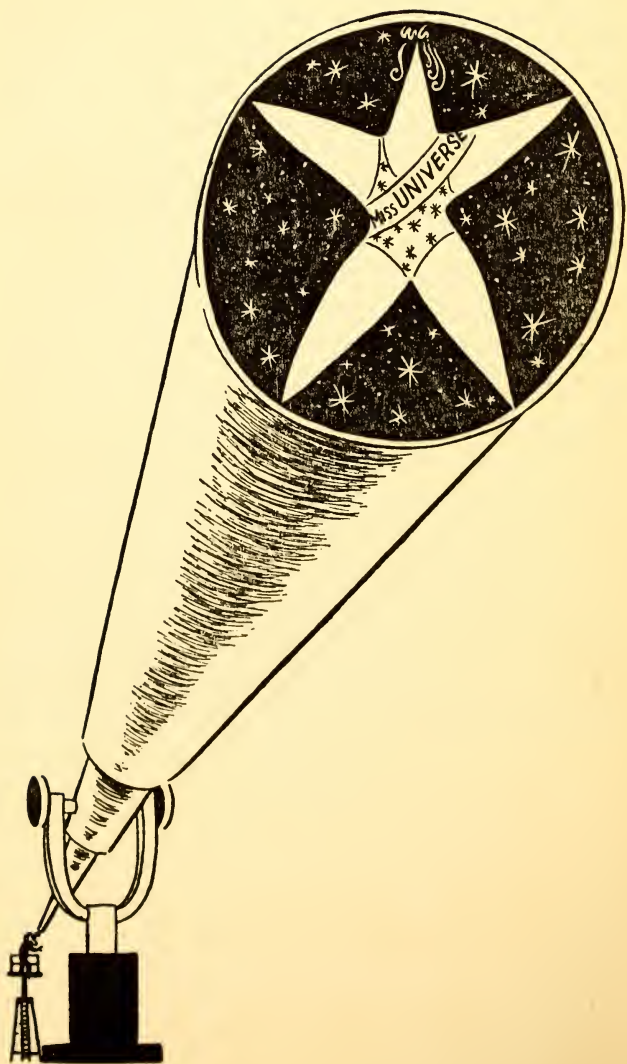
door's opening, one more soul liberated and you moving up a notch. You multiply the number of minutes he has consumed by the people ahead of you and discouragement seizes you. You ought to have brought along that set of Henry James you've always been vowing to read when you had time. If there were only some means of hiring a stand-in to come keep your turn for you, you might run out and do some shopping or take in a movie or two. Even if the waiting patients would get together and play "Up Jenkins" it might be more bearable. Finally with the slowness but sureness of a glacier's flow your turn arrives and the young lady beckons you in.

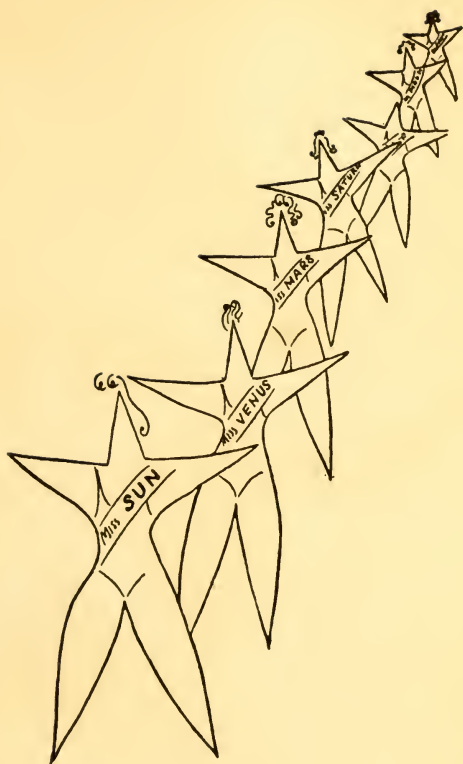
The cutting remarks that you've been rehearsing to the effect that the doctor may think he's busy but there are other busy people in the world too vanish at sight of his bland smile and his white coat bristling with instruments. He furthermore forestalls you by saying that he's sorry to have kept you waiting but he's had to do a tonsilectomy (which merely means he's been taking out some poor devil's tonsils). You are weak enough to murmur that it's all right, happy to reach the chair at last. But even now there may be a further catch. Some of these pampered physicians have more than one room in which they portion off their clientele like booths at a hairdresser's. Having

EAR, NOSE AND THROAT

put you in the chair and pinned you down with a bib he often as not leaves you for another period of waiting with so much cotton, argyrol and oddments stuffed into your head you feel like something left at the taxidermist's and don't dare try to make a get-away. Here is not even a copy of an ancient magazine. For reading matter you peruse the diplomas framed on the walls and for grim diversion gaze at the instruments in the cabinet beside you. You'd like to play with the electric spray but hesitate. Finally he returns and you, too, go through the routine of sound effects by which the wretches waiting without can judge their turns.

I have the greatest admiration for throat specialists. I am fond of them, I patronize them far more than I care to say, but I do resent their methods. When other members of other professions can make and keep appointments, where do they get the divine right to treat their clientele like a car-load for the stock-yards? Who, then, will join the S. P. B. T. S. (the Society for the Prevention of the Behavior of Throat Specialists)? Up, up, bronchials, adenoidals and sinus-sufferers! Let's take a stand for our rights. Throw off the tongue-depressor of tyranny! Hurrah for St. Larynx and promptly kept appointments! All we ask is a break.





HEAVENLY BODIES

HEAVENLY BODIES



HERE'S no better way of getting acquainted with your own particular form of dementia praecox than by having a baby. The subconscious, or whatever it is that obtrudes itself at such times (and I'm not speaking anatomically), discloses not only a fascinating diversity of hitherto secret cravings that range from Bar-le-Duc to hamburgers, but reveals certain intellectual yearnings equally as startling. In my own case the thirst for academic venture may have been

DITHERS AND JITTERS

prompted by the fact that as more and more my happy state became manifest, not only did my hat, due to an instinctive sense of balance, go further and further onto the back of my head, but my gaze went more and more heavenward. Whatever the cause, the subsequent outcome was that I went in for astronomy.

In the Sunday paper an ad of a home-study course given by a certain New York university presented an impressive list of get-cultured-quick subjects and requested you to check the one in which you were interested. For some unaccountable reason I found myself checking "Popular Astronomy." My marks in science and mathematics are still a source of hearty merriment in the archives of my alma mater. The fact that I imagined I could comprehend the most simple elements of this complicated study merely goes to prove that the mind of the expectant mother is in a state that it is only kind to describe as "innocent." Somehow I harbored a cheerful delusion that a "popular" course would have nothing particularly scientific or mathematical about it. I imagined it would all be very pretty and Jules Verneish, concerning itself with possible life on Mars, the colors of the rings of Saturn and the legends of the Zodiac, with maybe a slight flyer in numerology. Nor was I

HEAVENLY BODIES

undeceived by a solemn gentleman who called a few days later and departed with my check after having shamed me into signing up for the course.

A week later there arrived a package containing a loose-leaf notebook, a volume entitled "First Principles of Astronomy" and lesson No. 1. Accompanying these was a little celestial publication known as "The Monthly Sky Map" to which, it was impressive to learn, I was now a subscriber. This latter looked quite entertaining—much more so than the lesson, which seemed rather dry and had nothing to do with life on Mars. Why not, I thought, start in by first familiarizing myself with the starry firmament? This, I felt sure, would be comparatively simple. I'm good at road maps, why not at heavenly ones? But a sky map doesn't look like anything you've ever seen before. What's more, it doesn't look anything like the sky. It merely shows a bunch of black dots, which are connected by black lines in a helpful attempt to indicate stars and constellations. But the orbs above (or below for that matter—one of the stark facts we learn in astronomy is that, like Santa Claus, there is no *up* or *down*), these orbs are far too preoccupied whirling through space at outrageous speeds to throw out any connecting lines for the benefit of backward

DITHERS AND JITTERS

students. You just have to imagine them, pick out a bunch of stars, say "That's Hercules" and hope to God it is.

The signs of the Zodiac may look fairly plausible in bronze on the floor of a bank; but in their proper sphere they seem pretty screwy, and I think it's about time some scientists got together and either re-named them or did something to their outlines. I can understand the Dippers and I highly approve of Orion; I can even get the gist of that excruciatingly uncomfortable chair of Cassiopeia's. But why a Swan should look like a kite or why this should represent a goat:



or why Aries should be supposed to look like this:



leads one to suspect that the ancients who named these heavenly bodies did so after a good many swigs of vintage mead.

HEAVENLY BODIES

However, I was not in a position to question their outline, my own being alarmingly out of drawing at the time. My position was to place and study them, and that position, it seemed, had perforce to be a recumbent one. Gazing down at a map, then trying to see the whole thing reversed and above you is a mental hazard a good deal like trying to draw a pig in a mirror. There was no alternative but to go outdoors, lie down and hold the chart above me. This was further complicated by the incontrovertible fact that stars can be studied only at night, which meant that I had to take along a flashlight. By its uncertain illumination I would try to memorize the printed matter held waveringly above my head, extinguish the light, wait till my pupils reacted to the dark, then try to find something in the dome on high that remotely resembled the dots on the paper.

Even this might have been easy had not the sky map gone technical and announced that it represented the Eastern heavens at 10 P. M. and that unless you started out by facing the North Star it would all be quite hopeless. Nine persons out of ten will tell you they can find the North Star (as if once they'd found it they'd know what to do with it) by stating that the Dipper points to it. That may be; but to my way of perceiving, the Dipper points to a hell of a

DITHERS AND JITTERS

lot of other stars as well and, what's even more confusing, the Dipper itself has a dirty way sometimes of appearing upside down or listing to port, so that it's a long time before you can recognize it.

For these observations, my Mt. Wilson was a small hill which, if truth were told, covers the cesspool. Interruptions and annoyances were numerous. Moths attracted by the flashlight fluttered onto the chart and my face, mosquitoes attacked in swarms and an apprehensive bat occasionally swooped down to ascertain what it was all about. Under me in the grass stirred creatures I couldn't see (those, that is, that escaped annihilation when I lay down), and from the bushes came muffled and sinister sounds that could only be attributed to assassins. My studies bravely concluded, there came the problem of getting up. Being in a condition which etiquette from some perverted sense of humor refers to as "delicate," having once succeeded in getting horizontal, I found it nigh to impossible to become perpendicular or even diagonal again without help from outside. I found my family as heartlessly reluctant to stumble out into the night for the purpose of helping me to my feet as they were indifferent to my willingness to return the favor by demonstrating a few results of my studies. Even today whenever I ask if they'd care to have

HEAVENLY BODIES

me show them Gemini the Twins, their harsh and invariable reply is "Good God, no!"

Having gained, along with a distant acquaintance with Scorpio, a bad cold and a collection of mosquito bites that vied with the dots of the Milky Way, I thought I'd better take a hint from a discreet letter that arrived from my professor asking if it wasn't about time I got to work, and tackled the first lesson. This, it seemed, concerned the solar system, and I could make no headway with it at all until I recalled a juvenile method of scientific illustration that was handed out to us in school in a class known, all-embracingly enough, as "Science." This was the old expedient of twirling an apple representative of the earth round a candle symbolic of the sun.

Fired with the spirit of Galileo I went even further and decided to use an orange for Mercury, a grapefruit for Jupiter and a radish which might come in handy for any stray satellite. When I requested these provisions from the cook she, with admirable understanding, attributed it to some new prenatal craving. When, however, she later spied me walking round and round a candle that burned brightly on the piano stool, turning in one hand an apple and in the other a grapefruit, the while I attempted with the radish held in my mouth to make it revolve about the

DITHERS AND JITTERS

lemon, her understanding gave way to terror. Nor did my feeble explanation that I was studying astronomy in any way reassure her. She retreated with a couple of "Hail Marys" and has regarded me with suspicion ever since.

After considerable mental anguish I completed lesson No. 1, which was returned some days later with the startling mark of A. The next lesson took me two weeks to finish and was returned marked B. The third contained a lot of silly questions, among them "How much does the earth weigh?"; to which I answered, "Really, Professor, I'm not Atlas!" which was sassy of me and got me a C. The fourth lesson I tried to do in the hospital. Astronomy and motherhood don't go so well together. My paper came back with a reproachful D and the suggestion that I wasn't doing as well as they'd wish. After that I gave up. At the downward rate I was going there was no use continuing on to Z.

When I figured out the cost of the course, each lesson had set me back about nineteen dollars. But then I had that subscription to "The Monthly Sky Map," which continued to brighten my home for several months. Also, even if my family *doesn't* care, I learned to find Sagittarius and the Pleiades. If any of you'd like to come over some starry night, I'd be glad to point them out.



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